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ARGOSY

APRIL 1957

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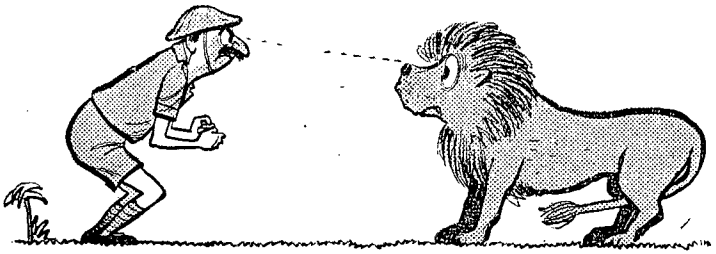

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ARGOSY

Contents for April, 1957

Vol. XVIII **No. 4**

		Page
Log Book		4
Illustrations by Graham		
Dinner for Four	**Christopher Landon**	7
The extract from "An Edwardian Youth," by courtesy of Macmillan and Company		
Shango's Magic	**John Salt**	13
The First Night of Lent	**Ray Bradbury**	27
Father's Day		34
Illustrations by Roy Berry		
The excerpt from Darwin's Journal from "Apes, Angels and Victorians," by permission of Weidenfeld and Nicolson; the poem by Ogden Nash from "The Face is Familiar," by courtesy of J. M. Dent and Sons; "Ill couched," by permission of Hamish Hamilton; "Keyed Up," from Sacheverell Sitwell's "Collected Poems," by courtesy of Duckworth and Company; "Dragged Up," by permission of Peter Nevill		
Direct Approach	**Richard Stern**	37
Source Seven	**Michael Gilbert**	51
Women Mean Trouble	**Edward Lindall**	65
The extract from "Time out of Mind," by courtesy of Arthur Barker		
Favour for Lefty	**Charles Einstein**	79
Leopard Platoon	**Michael Tetley**	83
Whoa, Noah!		89
Prow'd Beauty		90
Illustrations by Margaret Sweeney		
The poem by Goodridge MacDonald from "The Dying General," by permission of The Ryerson Press; "Waterfront," by courtesy of André Deutsch; "River Cruise," by permission of the Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow; "Dog Watch," by courtesy of Jonathan Cape; "Night Voyage," from "Selected Poems," by Wallace Stevens by permission of Faber and Faber		
Spy Story (Science Fiction Choice)	**Robert Sheckley**	93
Copyright 1955 by HMH Publishing Company for Playboy Magazine. Reprinted by Permission		
Death of a Huntsman	**H. E. Bates**	104
Decoration by Owen Ward		
Argosy Crossword		144

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ARGOSY Log Book

HEROES of thrillers divide into two kinds, the well-equipped and the resourceful. A detective of the first type, for instance, left imprisoned in an abandoned tube station by the villainous Dr. Dakobra, is not at a loss for a moment.

He goes through his pockets, finds a ratchet screwdriver, torch, and Geiger counter, and is out of there in no time and chugging in pursuit on a borrowed motor scooter.

The second type of hero has no tools in his pockets, but is so handy with a hairpin, detected by his trained eye in the middle of the track, that it is the work of a moment to dismantle a cabinet full of firemen's equipment, help himself to an axe, improvise some pitons, and climb up the two-thousand-foot lift-shaft.

We sometimes ask ourselves how *we* would manage in similar circumstances. To begin with, we came very badly out of the pocket test. No ratchet screwdriver, not so much as a nail-file. We carry our cigarettes in a squashed packet instead of in a gun-metal case that could be used for dropping thugs and smashing glass; we don't even wear diamond cuff links that could be used for scratching SOS messages on the sides of bottles. Worst of all, we doubt our capacity to pick a lock with a hairpin, should we succeed in finding one. There is something very intransigent about hairpins, in our experience.

However there *is* something we have which those types haven't, and that is the new issue of Argosy tucked in our pistol-pocket. We can sit down happily and wait to be rescued . . .

We are privileged to present in this issue of Argosy a distinguished new short novel by **H. E. Bates**, which will form the title story in his forthcoming volume of short stories. *Death of*

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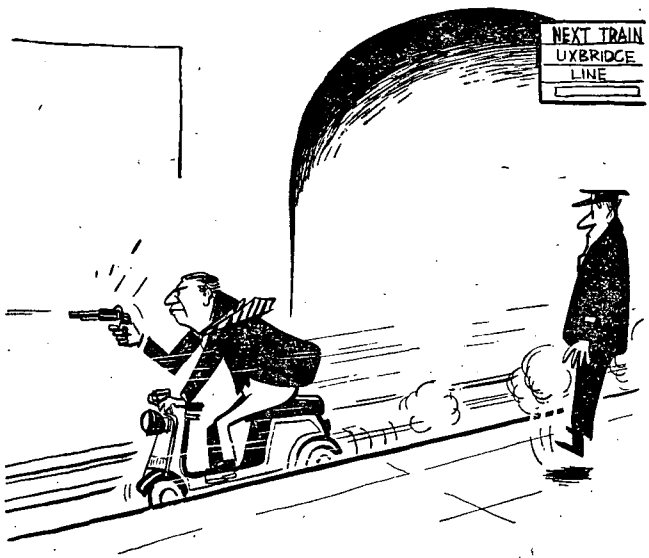
a Huntsman, has many unforgettable moments of pure beauty, and also contains some biting character sketches and a witty study of the commuting semi-country gentry who divide their lives between the hunting-field and the eight-fifteen. Mr. Bates said recently that he thought writing and painting should be closer to each other; that writers should write more with the eye, in the open air, less in the studio. There's certainly nothing suggesting the posed lay-figure in his new story, which is disturbingly alive.

Michael Gilbert is well qualified to write thrillers about heroes trapped in wine-vats, for he spent a holiday in the Bordeaux area, based on the town of Pauillac and visiting a number of world-famous vineyards. The hospitality he received confirmed his lifelong interest in wine; he says he has now probably drunk more 1950 and 1951 Mouton-Rothschild than anyone else in the world. He did not, he says, see any ghosts in the cellars he visited, but such was the potency of the atmosphere that he was prepared for anything from white mice to pink snakes.

Plain space, apparently, is not enough for **Robert Sheckley**: in his new story he overflows into the world of international intrigue where walls have ears and even spaceships are equipped with cloaks and daggers.



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Horatio, our retired A.B., who sometimes lends a hand with opening manuscripts, recently exclaimed that it must be easy to write a story, and he'd be blowed if he didn't have a shot at it. A couple of hours later, looking rather less happy, he fished Polti's *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* out of the bookshelf and began applying himself seriously to them.

Number 28, Obstacles to Love, struck him as an easy lay, since all it required was two lovers and an obstacle, and he set to work again. Two days later he stumped away from his typewriter in despair. We had a look at what he'd written and found he'd got his hero and heroine into such a predicament that he couldn't fetch them out of it. We are inviting readers to solve his problem, and have synopsized his plot as follows:

The hero's on Mars, with a pen-friend on Venus;
She cries, Oh! what millions of light-years between us!
When his spaceship comes in I'll be well past my prime;
How, how can we bypass this barrier of time?

Two guineas goes to the best four-line verse relating how the unhappy couple got themselves out of this fix. Send entries on a postcard to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, London E.C.4.

JOHN SILVER

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DINNER FOR FOUR

His turban white in the moonlight
the Mullah huddled on the snowy Maidan

BY CHRISTOPHER LANDON

ALL Persians have heard of the Mullah Kwaja Nasr-el-Din: that cunning, witty, rapacious priest of Islam who lived in the town of Khorrabad. Boastful, a gambler who would bet on anything, here is the story of how he lost the price of a fine dinner to his three friends, Ali the Cobbler, Bezard the Tailor, and Reza the Coppersmith.

It was in the bitter cold of the Persian mountain winter, and in Khorrabad, lying on one of the high passes, there was three foot of snow lying like a white blanket on the Maidan—the wide central square—drifting against the Mosque and the huddle of mud huts that surrounded it, keeping cattle and goats confined to their byres, stopping all traffic down the road to the outside world.

But on this particular winter evening it did not worry the Mullah and his three cronies in the slightest. They were sitting, snug and warm, in the house of the Cobbler, with their feet tucked under the coursi. The coursi is a low, wide table, the top not more than two feet from the floor, and you sit with your legs tucked under it, with cushions and blankets at your back and sides to keep out the draught—more important, to keep *in* the hot air that wafts up through a hole in the floor from a brazier burning in the cellar below. So these four, with the fire burning bright below them, the samovar bubbling on the table, and the tea sweet and strong, had not a care for what was happening outside. And, as if to give them greater comfort, the talk drifted to tales of winter.

The Tailor told of the mountain streams he had seen, frozen to stone, when he had trudged up the pass to deliver a shirt three days before; the Coppersmith capped this with the time he had seen birds falling dead from cold in the air. But the Mullah said nothing, smiling secretly into his beard until they had all finished.

"Cold . . ." he said suddenly. "Friends, you do not understand the matter. There is no cold . . . to any man with a heart that burns with the fires of purity and righteousness."

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The Tailor said, " You would not tell me that if you had had to come up the pass with me. I am a good man, I think; yet I could not feel my toes, nor my calves, nor my thighs."

" Then your heart cannot be warm."

The Coppersmith spat delicately over the coursi. " It is easy to talk," he said, reaching out to fill his cup from the samovar.

The Mullah looked round the three. " Also easy to prove. I will do it . . . for a small bet."

They knew the Mullah, and they knew his bets: most of them turned out to be on certainties. But they could not let the matter drop, for, like all Persians, they dearly loved a wager. There was a long silence while warning glances flashed between them, then Ali the Cobbler said slowly and carefully, " And what would be the bet . . . and the stake? "

" The bet—that I can go now, with only one blanket, and sit in the middle of the Maidan in the snow until the dawn prayer. That, because my heart is so full of good thoughts, I shall keep as warm as if I were sitting here with you at the table."

The others snorted in disbelief: there were many degrees of frost outside, and they knew that by dawn he would be as stiff as a board.

But the Mullah just smiled at them and said, " I can do it, friends. For a stake that is loaded greatly in your favour. A dinner—with the best pilaw that can be obtained, with chicken, and wild plums, and the finest rice—" He held up his hand as they started to murmur at the expense. " I would point out that if I win—which I will—I should be entitled to a dinner with each in turn, but I will settle for one, provided it is of the very best."

Bezard sneered, " You *say* you will sit there all night. How are we to know if it is true? "

" Come and sit with me. No, your hearts are too black. You would die within an hour. But God will provide a witness, friends. The snow. It is unmarked in the middle of the Maidan, and when you come to find me in the morning there will be only one set of footprints, leading out to where I am sitting . . . none returning."

They sat and thought of any possible catch, then of the cold, and each knew he would not dare to sit with the Mullah. At last the Tailor said, " It is a bet. And a trust between us four till dawn. Then we shall come and claim our dinner."

The Mullah pushed the cushions away from his back and slid his legs out from under the coursi. " Are you sure that you trust me, friends? " He said it again when his hand was on the latch and the door was ajar, and they could feel the frost creeping in, hear the dogs howling to the pale moon.

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"Yes," they said as one, tucking their legs more firmly under the table.

"Till dawn, then." And the Mullah had gone.

They sat on for an hour, finishing the tea. Then the Coppersmith and the Tailor said they must make their way home to bed. "Why not go on your way home and see if he is there?" said the Cobbler, who did not have to move. "After all, the Maidan is only a few paces farther than your homes."

They cursed him silently, and went out into the snow, huddled in their cloaks. "Only to the corner of the Maidan," whispered the Tailor, his teeth chattering. "That will be enough—just to see if he is really there."

They trudged through the slush and peered out of the alley that led into the Maidan: it was a white blanket of snow, the pale moon lighting it fitfully. Not a light showed from the houses that surrounded it. There was one set of footprints, clearly marked, that led straight to the centre; and there was the still, huddled mound of the Mullah, shrouded in his blanket, and his turban gleaming white above it, though his face was obscured by shadow.

The Tailor and the Coppersmith looked at each other and nodded.

"Do you think we should go and see?" said the Tailor doubtfully. "Perhaps he is frozen already."

"No. It is too cold and wet out there. Tomorrow at dawn will be soon enough." They both turned and parted their ways to slink off to bed.

At about the same moment, the Mullah, dry and warm in front of a roaring fire, reached for his third cup of tea . . .

When he left the Cobbler's house, the Mullah's progress had been rapid and peculiar. He had not gone straight to the Maidan, but dodged through the alleys to the back door of a house that overlooked it, the house of the widow of Benyon Khamis, a lady in whom he had more than spiritual interest. A triple knock, a short wait, and the door opened. The widow stood there, shading the rush light.

"Make the fire bright," said the Mullah briskly. "Get tea ready, and I shall be back in half an hour. But give me now a white sheet, some leather thongs, and a bundle of your kindling-wood."

The widow did as she was bid, and the Mullah trudged out again, with the thongs and sheet stuffed inside his shirt, the bundle of kindling-wood lying invisible against his dark blanket as it hung over his back—not the small pieces of split pine that we know,

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but a dry, springy bunch of tamarisk, as high as a sheaf of corn. He walked to the centre of the Maidan, slowly, carefully planting his footsteps in the virgin snow. When he stopped, he looked up at the sky and smiled—no snow that night from those cold, brittle stars. He looked round the Maidan: there was no one in sight, nor any light from the houses.

He crouched, putting the bundle of tamarisk upright in front of him like a sheaf, draping the dark blanket round it and crowning it with the turban from his head. Then, shivering from the cold dampness of the snow against his stockinged feet, he took off his slippers one after the other, binding them to his feet with the thongs so that they lay back to front.

With the white sheet over his head making him almost invisible, he retraced his steps, planting the reversed shoes exactly in the imprints he had made before. At the corner of the square he turned to look back. The effigy was most impressive. Then to the widow's house, the fire, and his tea.

He was content. The chicken and rice were almost in his mouth. But . . . just in case, he had to make sure. "Woman," he said, glancing across to where she crouched, "at two hours before dawn, light the lamp and set it in the window. Then wake me. But do not speak of it to anyone."

The widow obeyed, as she always did, and by the dawn prayer he was sitting on the bundle of tamarisk, a little cold, a little stiff, waiting for his friends to come and claim their dinner. He smiled as he watched them come . . . their careful examination of his footsteps; he smiled wider still at the look of incredulity on their faces as he rose to greet them.

Then Bezard pointed at the bundle of tamarisk he had been sitting on. "A fire!" he said. "You have had a fire."

"No. There was no fire. But at the third hour, my thoughts were so holy that the snow started to melt round me, and if I had not had this raft, I should have drowned."

He sensed their indecision as they shuffled and stared at their feet; he was determined to press home his advantage. He spoke too hastily and made his great mistake.

"Look, friends. You do not believe me. But I will give an Alumet—a sign and a proof—that I have been here." He laid his finger against his nose and looked very cunning. "Go before me to the house of the widow of Benyon Khamis: ask her what time she put a light in the window of her house. I will tell you first. At the fifth hour, and I watched it burn till dawn."

Now they knew where he had been. But they also knew the widow, and that it would be impossible to prove it. They walked across the Maidan behind him, muttering between themselves

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as to who would provide what for the feast. Suddenly the Coppersmith fell silent, and then a broad smile lit his face.

"Father of a thousand lies," he shouted at the figure in front, "you have lost your bet."

"How so?" The Mullah turned in his stride.

"You say you sat and watched the widow's light for two hours?"

"I did."

"Then you have been warmed by it. Do you know of the camel men, when they camp with their herds in the desert?"

"What of them?"

"They light their fire and sit round it; the camels are hobbled in a circle, some fifty paces away. The camels see the fire and, seeing it, think they are warm—so they *are* warmed."

"An old wives' tale," said the Mullah crossly. "And even if it were true, how could it apply to me? It was a lamp, not a fire; and the widow's window is a good two hundred paces from where I sat."

"What is good for a camel and a fire at fifty is good for a man of God and a lamp at two hundred," said the Tailor quickly, joining in as he saw a way out of their difficulty.

"Nonsense!"

They argued all the way to the corner of the square, and eventually it was decided, by three votes to one, to refer the matter to the Headman for a ruling. He heard the case and found that if the matter of the camels was true, which all knew, then even a Mullah must be affected by the sight of a lamp, however little.

The bet was lost.

The three were surprised at the good grace with which the Mullah took the decision. He even smiled as he invited them to his house at seven that very evening.

They came punctually, having fasted all day to take a larger fill, and sat round the coursi, chatting idly as they waited for the banquet. The tea was of poor quality and weak, while the brazier smoked—they almost forgave that as they waited, dreaming of what was to come. The Tailor did mention it at last, only to be told by the Mullah that those items were not included in the wager.

They sat on . . . one hour . . . two . . . but still that fine pilaw did not appear. Talk between them came to a standstill; their bellies were as empty as drums, their mouths drooling, but still no food. Only the Mullah, smiling as he quoted long passages from the Book, now broke the silence.

At last the Coppersmith could contain himself no longer.

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Making the excuse to go to the courtyard, he crept round it to the far side and peered into the Mullah's kitchen. There was the pot with the cut chicken, the wild plums, and the walnuts, all ready for cooking. There was the big copper cauldron, with the rice in it, waiting to boil. But there was no fire under either: both were stone cold. On the far side of the room one small candle burnt on the floor.

"What is this?" The Coppersmith had stormed back to the living-room and was banging on the coursi. "What insult is this? We have been drinking your filthy tea for two hours waiting for our food—the result of our wager. And it is not even cooking."

"But it is," said the Mullah gently. "It is . . ."

"There is no fire beneath it," roared the Coppersmith. "Only a wretched candle burning on the far side of the room."

"But that is cooking it, my friend. Have patience. It will cook it in God's good time. For, surely, what is good for a camel with a fire at fifty paces and is good for a Mullah with a lamp at two hundred is good for a pilaw with a candle at three . . . ?"

★ ★ ★

JONES OF CONTENTION

The Wadham gardens were well guarded, for to visit them it was necessary to pass through the Warden's own Lodgings, and to write your name and College in a copy-book, to which a pencil was attached by a string, that lay upon a table in the passage. There were several of us, and I came last, and to save time scribbled "Jones" in the book, without initials. On our return we were confronted by the Warden, lame little Dr. Wells, looking displeased.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I did not think that men from my own College, when taking advantage of a privilege, would have sunk so low as to write 'Jones' in my book."

I made a stiff little bow. "Unfortunately for me, sir, it happens to be my name."

The Warden made a very low bow indeed. "Sir," he said, "I humbly beg your pardon."

He made amends by inviting me to come when I liked, and to disregard the book. This was the first occasion in my life when I discovered that "Jones" is not always acceptable as a surname. When I became engaged my future father-in-law gave the news to a country neighbour, who first laughed, then said: "And now tell me his real name."

L. E. JONES, *An Edwardian Youth*

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SHANGO'S MAGIC

" Into the sea with it, man "
he whispered urgently

BY JOHN SALT

IT was the First Secretary at Government House, working ill-temperedly and overlate, who affixed the fifth and final signature to a document ensuring that the freighter *Emilie Delbos*, lying broken-backed across a reef in ten fathoms of water off the island of Huevos, would eventually be lifted and that Johnny Martins, seeking an elusive fortune, would come to Trinidad.

The Portuguese creole, Staban Gomes, put in the lowest tender and won the contract which on merit he hardly deserved. For Mr. Gomes was not a nice man. His mind was a ticking cash-register that never stopped work and his soul was made of counterfeit silver coin, smooth and shiny and debased. He was short and very fat, rolls of it bulged his collar and forced his chin high in the air. He walked with a brisk and self-important strut and barked his words in brief, explosive sentences while his wary eyes looked anywhere but at the person he addressed, or hid themselves altogether behind puffy lids.

It was surprising then that so unpleasant a man should possess so lovely a daughter; for Anita was beautiful. Slender and dark in the way of some southern women, she had eyes that shone and flashed with the vivid life that was in her, soft and fierce by turns according to her mood. Her body was firm and smooth to the touch like fine silk and her skin glowed golden. But those eyes could melt the heart of a man or turn his brain, and they destroyed the peace of Johnny Martins entirely when he came ashore from the fishing-boat that had carried him from his island home in the Grenadines.

The quayside folk and the idlers told him who she was. Anita Gomes, standing there with her rich father and that other, the big one, Louis Toussaint, him whom they called Shango because his mother's half-cousin by marriage had been a great witch in her time, over to Blanchisseuse.

" Watch out for Shango, man," they cried. " Don't you meddle with him, small-island boy. Shango carry the medicine

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bones. He magic himself a foreman job with Staban Gomes and he put a big obeah on that girl so she don't look at no other man."

But Johnny smiled in his open way and looked over their heads to where Anita stood. At the same instant she turned and their glances met, held in a long magic moment. Johnny just stood there with the big smile upon his face and the harbour wind blowing the loose yellow shirt flat against his deep chest. Six foot and more of small-island man, strong and supple as a young tree, scared of nothing.

Shango dropped a heavy hand on Anita's arm and turned her away. He scowled at Johnny and the smile left the islander's face. He stood watching while Shango, Anita, and Gomes walked from the quay, then turned again to the chattering group that surrounded him.

"You folks just seen Mrs. Martins that's going to be," he announced.

The mood of the crowd changed. "You crazy, man," said one. "And too proud," said another. "Like all you small-island boys," they said. "You come to Trinidad, taking the bread from other men's mouths, then you go back in a swagger coat and we don't see you no more. Go 'long, boy. Ain't no place for you here."

Johnny grinned at them, slung his sea bag over his shoulder and set off inland to the address of a boarding-house a friend had recommended. It was well out of town on the road to the Caroni swamp, set among trees where the keskidee sings, the bird that says, "What did you say?" in French all day.

The establishment was run at considerable profit by an elderly female descendant of Yoruba slaves and kings who was named Tante Tin Gut by the lodgers. Tante Tin Gut was a despot, benevolent up to a point, but she kept order with a rawhide whip and maintained a strict lien upon all hard spirits and ready money brought into her house. In return she cooked and washed, prepared salves for rheumatism and cures for love, and dispensed much sage advice which was largely ignored.

Tante loved a proper man and her eyes, rheumed and red-rimmed from the smoke of her pipe, flickered with sleepy interest when the giant form of Johnny Martins darkened her doorway. The islander regarded her with frank curiosity for, old though she might be and fat, Tante Tin Gut remained flamboyantly youthful in her dress. Today she wore a purple blouse of striped pyjama silk, tucked into the waistband of a voluminous skirt patterned in bright Paisley, while on her head there sat a head-scarf of yellow and green, tightly swathed and tied at the back in two great butterfly wings.

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She sat in the manner of the women of the Coast, with knees set wide, and the wings of her headdress dipped and nodded as she bent over to read the pencilled note that Johnny handed to her. She raised her head then with a surprising flash of white and solid teeth, and swept a broad hand wide towards the parallel rows of empty pallets that ran the length of the room.

"Pick you'self a bed, son. Make you'self to home." Then she reverted to a sterner mood. "We got ourselves some rules here, man. There's things I don't 'low, not for nobody. Fix you'self a seat and eat a bite of fish while I tells it you."

Johnny took the plate she held out and set himself to listen to the old lady. Tante Tin Gut fixed him with a glassy stare and began. "First off I don't 'low no gambling in this place. Seems like folks lose money gambling, then they gets to fighting, and any road they don't get to pay me. So gambling is right out. That's number one."

Johnny nodded and said nothing.

"In the second place I don't 'low no drinking in here. Drink is ruination and I do abominate it. 'Cept of course when I gets the miseries in the rainy time, and I does get the miseries powerful bad." She paused a moment with her head on one side, regarding Johnny with a sly upward glance. Still the young man was silent.

"Drinking, gambling," she ticked them off on her fingers. "Tune-playing, that's the last one. No, man, I don't 'low no kind of music around here."

Johnny put down his plate, picked up his bag, and stood up.

"Where you going, son?" the old lady asked suspiciously.

The islander looked down at her solemnly. "Well, ma'am, first off I'm going back into town to find me a poker school. Then when I get real thirsty playing the cards, I'm going to open my medicine bottle and take me a drink or two. And when I quit drinking I'm going to sing."

Tante Tin Gut rocked far back on her haunches until it seemed that she must topple over backwards. Then she came forward again with a rush, roaring with laughter. Rummaging among some sacks at her feet, she drew out a large black bottle and loosened the stopper. Without a word she handed the bottle to Johnny, watching him while he drank.

"What about the rules then, Tante?"

"Rules—hell, son. Reckon a woman's got a right to know what company she's keeping before she offers a man a bed." She took a drink and shot a swift glance at Johnny. "What you plan to do in Trinidad, son? Who you going to work for?"

"I heard Gomes is good."

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"You heard wrong, then. But Gomes's money is good and that's what you small-island boys come for. Yes, man, you make a big dollar working for Staban Gomes. He got a ship to raise out near Huevos and there'll be salvage in that and maybe a bonus for the diving-teams. Still, better not go to Gomes. He a bad man."

Johnny closed his mouth like a trap. "I go work for Gomes," he said.

"Why so sure, tall boy?"

"Me and his daughter going to marry up."

Tante Tin Gut did not laugh at him as the others had done on the quay. There was no amusement in her eyes, only horror. "Marry, man? You crazy for so. Ain't you hear tell of Shango Louis?"

"I got a bellyful of Shango."

"You've never seen him."

"I did today down by the Carenage. He's big but he don't scare me."

"Size don't signify, son. He knows maybe a trick or two that you've forgotten."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Ain't trying to say nothing, only Shango's folks came here back along from the French island and they brought the old ways with them, the old ways we don't forget. Why do you think that young girl lets Shango tag around her the way he does? That's obeah, son, and you won't break the spell so easy."

"Voodoo don't count these days, Tante."

"Ain't talking voodoo, son, just talking plain, ordinary sense." She leaned forward and became very earnest. "You just listen here, Johnny Martins. Don't you go picking no fights with Shango and if you do have trouble, don't never let him cross your shadow by moonlight, nor never let him break your reflection in clear water. There—ain't saying no more 'bout it."

"Have it your way, Tante. How do I set about getting a place with Gomes?"

"Just be there at first light tomorrow on the old Benbow Quay. Gomes taking on men all this week for the lifting job. Kin you swim, kin you dive or work a donkey pump, he'll take you on and glad to. You'll be working under Shango so just you mind what I telled you."

Tante's paying guests began to arrive in twos and threes as their work ended. By ten at night there was a poker school running high, three good fights, and a rum party. Tante moved through it all in great good humour, playing a hand at the cards,

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lending a fist in the fights, and drinking from her bottle. At midnight she cracked her whip and the party broke up. Men rolled into their bunks and began to shake the hut with their snoring.

Johnny lay awake into the small hours, thinking of Anita Gomes. But he was on the quay before dawn, one of a long line of men shuffling forward to a table where Gomes sat with Shango standing by his side, carrying a slate with the day's work list. A motor launch bumped against the quay and the men who were chosen filed aboard. Johnny gave his name, age, and occupation, conscious all the time of Toussaint's close scrutiny.

He looked up once and caught the foreman's eye. Toussaint was a head taller than Johnny but slighter in build. His face was lean and yellowish, with a curiously blank expression, but his eyes glittered coldly. His white towelling shirt was open to the navel, revealing a coiled snake tattooed across his stomach, writhing upwards over his chest; the fanged head at his throat was half hidden by a small leather bag suspended from his neck by links of blackened silver.

Johnny felt the shock as their eyes met. A cold shudder that was not fear shook him briefly and he saw Shango smile and write his name on the work list. He walked aboard the launch and took a place in the bows as the tender chugged through the crowded harbour shipping and out into clear water for the run to Huevos.

A salvage vessel lay anchored a cable's length from the island and around it there clustered a flock of small craft and steel pontoons from which cables and pipelines led downwards to the wreck. A compressed-air machine thudded away on the deck of the depot ship and the ring of hammers on steel re-echoed across the water as the launch slowed alongside.

Johnny and three other men were off-loaded onto a pontoon moored to a buoy astern of the depot ship. It was their island for the day and they would not leave it until work ended in the evening. A tattered canvas awning kept off the worst of the sun but by noon the steel deck was like an oven plate. Johnny's task was to tend the air pump for divers working on the after part of the sunken *Emilie Delbos* and at intervals to help them from the water and remove their helmets for the spells of rest. Shango moved about among the pontoons in a rowing-boat. He never said a word, but men worked the faster at his approach and always Johnny felt the same odd chill in spite of the sun's blazing heat.

Gomes's people worked from sun-up until full dark, with a two-hour rest at midday. Work them till they drop was Gomes's

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maxim. He had a deadline to meet and would not fail for the lack of a little cheap labour. Not that the workpeople were underpaid, the hours themselves guaranteed a wage larger than anything else paid in the island, but whether the men lived long enough to enjoy it or even found the time to spend it was no concern of Staban Gomes.

Johnny worked like that for three days and never saw Anita. Then at noon on the fourth day, he saw a trim green-and-gold launch approaching the salvage fleet. Gomes was coming to inspect the work and had brought his daughter with him. Johnny stood up and leaned against the pump wheel; the launch came in close and he gazed at Anita.

For a second she smiled up at him, the wonderful eyes dancing; then the launch passed and she was gone. Johnny watched her board the big ship with her father and turned away rather sadly. But it gave him an idea, and when the launch passed him again an hour later, with Anita its only passenger, he tossed her a note wrapped around a small bolt-head. He watched it fall lightly among the folds of her skirt and saw her hand close over it as the boat drifted by.

The next moment Shango's dinghy fetched up against the pontoon and the foreman clambered out. He moved slowly towards Johnny and stood with his chest almost against the pump wheel as Johnny fed air to the man below. Neither spoke, but Johnny could feel the satanic fury flowing from the man facing him, a hatred that sought to chill and subdue. Toussaint stood for an instant, showing his teeth in a tight grin, then turned abruptly, and went back to his boat.

Johnny watched him go with a small sense of victory; there had been no need of words between them, each knew what the other wanted.

He told Tante about it that evening and the old woman wailed at him, "Leave be, leave be, you crazy man. What you put in that note, eh? What you say to that girl?"

"I told her I'd be at her garden gate Saturday night if she liked to come and see."

"Don't you go, Johnny, 'cause ef'n you do and Shango gets to know, you'll marry up with churchyard ground, six men to carry you and no bridal song."

"I'll take my chance of that."

"You ain't got no chance. You just small-island crazy, like I say."

But Johnny went to Gomes's house on the Saturday night. He had hurried from the quay to freshen himself at Tante's and stood now in his white suit in the shadow of the trees that fringed

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the garden of the long, low house on the road to Cocorite. Figures moved jerkily against the lighted glass of the verandah and soon one detached itself from the rest running out onto the open porch, pausing there a second, and fluttering, like a pale ghost among the fireflies, across the dew-damp lawn to the gate.

Johnny moved out to meet her until they stood gazing at each other with barely a foot of space between them. The moon bathed them both in lambent light, very white and silent. Suddenly, they moved with one accord into each other's arms. Johnny held her close. His heart began to thud while a trembling seized his body and communicated itself to the girl. She put up her hands and took his head, drawing it down to her lips. Johnny gazed an instant into her eyes and drowned there.

Very gradually, time began again for them both and Johnny began to talk to Anita, using strange words from his native island and murmured endearments. Then he felt her stiffen and knew that she was staring over his shoulder at something behind them. Pulling her gently round with one arm, he turned.

Shango stood in the road, unnaturally tall in the moonlight, his face lost in shadow. Once again Johnny could feel his evil magnetism, more powerful by night under the moon.

The girl twisted in his arms, struggling to free herself, to go to Shango. Johnny pulled her towards him again, forcing her head round to look at him. She trembled and panted like a terrified animal and all the time her gaze shifted back towards Shango. The foreman stood there, saying nothing.

Then the moonlight caught the glint of silver at Anita's throat and in a flash Johnny understood. His hand went to the chain and broke it, the small leather medicine bag came away and he hurled it far from him. "There, Anita, look at me. That's the true magic, you don't need to pay him no mind."

As if released from some strange spell, the girl turned; then with a sudden half-fearful sob she put her head down and clung to him. Johnny watched Shango glide away into the shadows, panther-soft and silent.

He walked home cautiously that night, keeping close in to the buildings on his way, careful that his moon shadow should not cross the road for any to walk upon. But, for all his care, Shango's men set upon him halfway to Tante's, and might have killed him with their steel claws had it not been for the Dekomba Boys.

These were among his earliest friends in the island, a group of youngsters, hardly more than children. Led by a fey, spindle-legged girl in a pinafore dress which might once, very long ago,

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have been starched and white, they haunted the streets and the docks, singing, and scavenging for money and food. Tante Tin Gut enjoyed their impromptu songs and often gave them shelter. One at least of their number had some schooling and was able to give a weird recitation of the calendar months from August, reciting them as Septembuary, Octobuary, Novembuary, and Dekomba. The last name stuck and gave the group its title.

They found Johnny in a dark alley off Frederick Street, bleeding from a head wound, and carted him home to Tante in triumph. Lying later on his pallet, he heard them singing about him, their voices thin and incongruously sweet:

Small-Island, go back where you really come from,
Small-Island, go back where you really come from.
You come to Trinidad in a fishing-boat,
Soon you go back in a sagger coat.
Small-Island, go back where you really come from.

Johnny was certainly making enough to go back in a swagger coat, but he was not going back to Carriacou without Anita. Sometimes he wondered what Gomes thought about it all.

Staban Gomes was a very worried man. So worried indeed that he went to see Tante Tin Gut.

The old lady nearly fell from her stool in astonishment when she saw the wealthy shipbreaker waddling through the mud to her front door. She viewed the approaching interview with some dismay since Gomes owned the roof over her head.

The contractor stood on no ceremony but dragged out a wooden box and sat down, facing Tante. " Who's this new man you've got? this Johnny Martins? "

Tante did not hedge. " He a small-island man from Carriacou, a right nice boy."

Gomes exploded. " What do you mean, nice, you fat-gutted old ruin? Don't you know he's been fly-by-nighting around my place, making up to my daughter? "

Tante was hurt by the reference to her figure and her eyes strayed longingly towards her whip, but wisely she said nothing.

" You're going to kick him out, old woman. We don't want that kind of trash in these parts."

" And ef'n I don't? "

" Then I shall kick you out. Take your choice."

Tante nodded, her double chins swaying dangerously. There was something about all this that puzzled her; she began to probe. " Why you want him to go, a nice boy like that? "

" I've just told you why."

" You going to fire him? "

" My man Toussaint will do that, these boys are two a penny."

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Tante drew a deep breath and took the plunge. "Why don' you fire that ol' Shango? Do you more good."

Gomes's puffy face went very pale. "What's that you said? Fire Shango?"

The old woman nodded calmly.

Gomes got up and walked about. "I can't do that."

"But you would if you could?"

Gomes blustered. "You don't understand. He's a useful man to me. I couldn't do without him. Anyway, I didn't come here to talk about Shango."

Tante reached down and found her bottle. "Wrap you'self round this, Gomes, you seem a mite nervous."

"I don't want your drink, old woman. You mind what I say and get rid of that young no-good."

"Ain't going to do it," said Tante, and took a long drink. "Why cain't you git rid of ol' Shango? Speak you' mind, man. Everybody tells old Tante sooner or later."

Gomes's face was mottled now and red. He ceased his pacing and sat down again, staring moodily at the board floor where Tante's hens scrabbled for the grit. Finally he began to speak, wrapping his words in obscurity as if afraid to make them clear even to himself.

"There's things I'd do in the light of day would scare me by the dark of the moon."

"That's double talk, rich man. What you trying to tell me and frightened I should know?"

The shipbreaker raised his head and stared at Tante with bloodshot fearful eyes. "Shango's my luck. I can't get shut of him."

"He's your misfortune, you mean. What you scared of?"

Gomes waved a silencing hand. "I'm not scared of anything but I tell you things go wrong without Toussaint. I can't keep a grip on the men, equipment gets lost, and we don't meet our contracts. Then there are accidents, queer accidents . . . men have died down there on the ocean bed. I've tried it before and I tell you it don't work. Shango's got to stay."

"And marry your daughter?"

Gomes shot bolt upright, horror in every line of his face. "What do you mean by that, you wicked old savage?"

"What I say." The old lady was primly complacent. "He's got that girl where he wants her, or leastways he did have till Johnny come along."

"You're crazy, woman. Toussaint's no 'count. He wouldn't raise his eyes to her."

"Not while you're about maybe, but you watch out. Some

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day he going to reach out and take that girl before you can't stop him. Yes, sir, only one man I know can maybe stop Shango Louis and you're wanting me to throw him out."

"I can handle Shango," said Gomes, but his voice carried no conviction.

"You couldn't handle ol' pussy cat," said Tante firmly, fortified by her bottle and quite forgetful of any respect due to her landlord. "Your girl got money of her own, ain't she?"

"How do you know that?"

Tante crowed triumphantly. "Man, they know that from Laventille to Sangre Grande and now you've admitted it. Her mother left it to her 'cause she said you had enough already, and that's truth, lord knows. So whoever gets the girl gets the money, and if you let it be Shango Louis, you is just plain wanting in the head."

Gomes turned on her savagely. "I've heard enough of this fool talk. No layabout loafer or small-island trash gets my girl. Not your Johnny nor my Toussaint. She's for better things than that."

Tante looked at him with contempt, she spoke slowly and with an odd dignity, a biting edge to her words.

"Was you such great shakes when you came to Trinidad, Staban Gomes, with one States dollar in your pocket and glad enough to sleep rough until you could make a killing? So you made good in the end and a lot of folks forgot how you began, but I don't forget and I'm a woman known for good sense in these parts. I got what I got and it's more than you, for all your big money and your big house."

She struck herself lightly on the chest. "I got it here, mister, blood and race and the ways of the old people that were there before you came and will be here when you've long gone. You say you ain't scared and I tell you that you're a fool. There's things should make you scared right here in this island, in the air you breathe, in the food you eat, in the hills and the woods around you. Shango knows about those things because they were in his family, but I know about them, too, and I'm wiser than him because I know that those old evil things are dying and passing. They'll last my time and maybe a few who come after me but they'll pass in the end like the long night until they are only fool things and charms that folks has forgotten the use and the meaning of."

"You talk like a crazy woman."

"I don't and you know I don't. People like Johnny Martins are the ones who'll end these things because they'll come right out in the open and face the evil and they don't scare easy. Oh,

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they'll feel the breath of the dark things from the forest and maybe it'll make them uneasy like a chill breeze by swamp water but they'll fight it and they'll win. Ain't no manner of use saying they won't, 'cause they will."

Gomes seemed restless and shaken. He reached a hand to Tante's bottle, uncorked it, and raised it to his lips. "It's Toussaint or Martins then?" he asked, putting the bottle down.

Tante nodded her head soberly. "That's the choice. The girl done made hers already. Now you've got to face it out. You knew that when you came here, else I wouldn't have spoken the way I did."

"Toussaint will try to pay him off today. He'll maybe work till the end of the week."

"He won't go."

"That's what I think. Where do we go from there?"

Tante grinned with unholy glee. "Reckon that's what we got to leave to your future son-in-law. Whichever one it will be." She raised her bottle to him in a mock salute.

Shango had given Johnny his notice that same morning, taking care that the dismissal should be heard by the greatest number possible as the battered motor launch took them out to Huevos. After that Johnny's workmates drew away from him. Nobody talked to him through all the forenoon, and a sense of crisis grew as the day wore on.

During the noon rest Johnny sat alone in the sun, his back against the pump wheel, while his mates beneath the awning talked in snatches, watching him covertly. Shango stood at the rail of the depot ship gazing down at the pontoon. The snake tattooed upon his chest glowed crimson in the sun, one of his hands toyed with the medicine bag at his throat; the other, white-knuckled, held the rail with a grip of steel.

Gomes came aboard at two o'clock, puffing importantly up the ladder of the steamship. He stood a moment in conversation with Toussaint and he too stared down at the motionless figure of Martins. The islander knew they were watching him but he neither looked up nor spoke, although every line of his body and face expressed anger and defiance.

When work began again, Toussaint beckoned Johnny's companions to row over to the depot ship in their dinghy, bringing a line from the pontoon. Martins walked aft, and at a signal from the depot ship, slipped the mooring-cable from the buoy so that the men on board the ship could warp the steel skid to a new position over the sunken freighter. The float was already in motion when the squall struck from a clear sky,

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driving inland from the open sea and already showering the twin heights of the Dragon Bocas with torrential rain while it beat the Gulf water into a white tide of fury that surged towards the salvage fleet.

The men on deck took a turn of their line around a cleat and Johnny clung to the pump wheel, bracing himself to await the shock. The first wave brought the pontoon heavily against the side of the ship, wrecking the ladder and landing-stage upon which Shango now stood. The foreman gathered himself in one smooth motion and leapt aboard to join Martins.

Now the pontoon seemed to take on a life of its own, moving in the path of the squall with the speed of an express train, driven by the force of the hurricane wind and the weight of many waters. It streamed out the full length of the wire hawser, which became a single bar of steel, straight and dangerously taut. For a second the cable held, then parted, one end whipping back against the ship's side and scoring a long line in the rust.

The two men on the pontoon clung with the strength of desperation to anything that would hold them, until at length the swell overturned the skid and hurled them both into the water. Johnny had a brief glimpse of flashing sea and sky, then he was under water with a great weight on his shoulders and iron hands tearing and grappling for his throat.

Shango and Johnny went down, down, until the eternal cold of deep water gripped them by the legs and waist. A filmy curtain of blood-red shot with stars hung before Johnny's eyes as the fingers of Toussaint worked to force the air from his lungs. His arms and hands were imprisoned between his own body and that of the foreman and he could not free them. His powerful legs kicked in vain towards the surface but Shango's weight continued to draw them both still deeper.

In a last desperate surge of strength, he raised his knees, forcing them into Toussaint's stomach muscles. His hands came free and he brought them up beneath the foreman's chin, forcing the man's face over and back. Their two bodies swayed apart, but Shango's hands continued to tear and squeeze at Johnny's throat. There was blood in the deep water as Johnny flexed his knees again and kicked powerfully with both feet.

He felt the shock of collision, a final intolerable pain at his throat; then he was free and kicking frantically towards the surface. He broke water gasping, his face and neck masked with blood. The squall had passed and the sea moved now in a long slow swell. The tidal current had brought him in close again to the big ship's side but the steel pontoon floated upside-down several hundred yards away.

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He drew breath painfully, trod water, and looked around him. Shango had surfaced a few feet away; he too was struggling for air and his face wore a dazed expression.

Johnny swam weakly towards him and the tide washed both men against the side of the ship as once again they engaged in silent, deadly battle.

Johnny twisted his hand in the silver chain that secured the bag at Shango's throat and the thin links bit deeply into the foreman's neck. His struggles weakened and ceased altogether when a lifebelt, thrown from the deck of the ship, hit him on the side of his head.

The belt sank at once, being stuffed with old pieces of metal and cotton waste, for Gomes had always found it cheaper merely to preserve the look of things than to replace them when they fell into disrepair.

Shango's head fell forward and he began to follow the lifebelt under water but Johnny, still wrenching at the silver chain, passed one arm beneath the man's shoulders and steered him to the wrecked ladder, supporting him there until rescuers could reach them both with a line.

Shango lay unconscious on the deck in a widening pool of water. Johnny bent down and tore the medicine bag from his throat. Gomes looked over his shoulder as he ripped the bag open. The contents were sodden now, shapeless, and almost unrecognizable, but Gomes closed his hand rapidly over the bag.

"Into the sea with it, man," he whispered urgently. "Now, while you have time."

Johnny obeyed him and watched the cock feathers, the pieces of paper and parchment, the tiny unknown animal fragments sink or float steadily away towards the Dragon Bocas.

The man on deck stirred and groaned, opened his eyes. His hand went at once to his throat, missing the bag. An expression of consternation, almost of fear, crossed his face and he raised himself heavily upon one elbow. The crew grinned at him sheepishly, ready to mock. Toussaint's gaze shifted to the impassive face of Gomes, the savage, bloody mask of Martins.

He rose to his feet and stood a moment, beaten and humiliated. His shoulders drooped abjectly and he began to shamble away aft through a line of watching men who one by one began to titter and finally, no longer intimidated, to laugh without control.

Tante Tin Gut threw a big party to celebrate the triumph and the Dekomba Boys stage-managed a parade from the quay, strutting out in front with swinging sticks and carnival drums made from heat-treated empty steel cans. Johnny did not stay

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long at the party but went on to Cocorite, travelling in style by taxi, with a big cigar and a broad smile.

Anita awaited him on the verandah with her father. The shipbreaker watched them silently as they stood before him hand in hand. Abruptly he strode inside and returned with a heavy cash box, which he thrust into Johnny's hands. Then he spoke in his old curt, explosive way. "That was hers, it's yours now. Just take it and go—with my blessing. But don't let me see either of you again for a time, till I get a chance to forget." He turned and went back into the house.

Johnny took Anita by the arm and led her over the wet green lawn, jewelled with fireflies, to the waiting taxi. They went back to Carriacou together in the same schooner that had brought Johnny to Trinidad, and as the small boat moved slowly away into the warm darkness he could hear the chant of the Dekomba steel band ranged upon the quay behind them, a faintly mocking, very gentle valedictory chorus borne fitfully on the harbour wind.

Small-Island, go back where you really come from,
Small-Island, go back where you really come from.

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★ *Ray Bradbury, acknowledged master of fantasy, here spins what purports to be a true story—but in his hands an Irish taxi-driver becomes wilder and more unexpected than many a spaceship pilot. Bradbury's recollections must be trustworthy, though, for he claims to be able to recall events that occurred when he was two days old, so his Irish memories should be crystal-clear—or at least, Irish-moss clear!*

THE FIRST NIGHT OF LENT

BY RAY BRADBURY

SO you want to know all the whys and wherefores of the Irish? What shapes them to their dooms and runs them on their way, you ask. Well, listen, then. For though I've known but a single Irishman in all my life, I knew him, without pause, for one hundred and forty-four consecutive nights. Stand close; perhaps in him you'll see that entire race which marches out of the rains but to vanish through the mists. Hold on, here they come! Look out, there they go!

This Irishman, his name was Nick.

During the autumn of 1953, I began to write the screenplay of *Moby Dick* in Dublin, and each afternoon a hired cab drove me thirty miles out from the River Liffey to the huge grey Victorian country house where John Huston, my producer-director, rode to hounds. There, we discussed my eight pages of daily script through the long autumn, winter, and early-spring evenings. Then, each midnight, ready to turn back to the Irish Sea and the Royal Hibernian Hotel, I'd wake the operator in the Kilcock village exchange and have her put me through to the warmest, if totally unheated, spot in town.

" Heeber Finn's pub? " I'd shout, once connected. " Is Nick there? Could you send him along here, please? "

My mind's eye saw them, the local boys lined up peering over the barricade at that freckled mirror so like a frozen winter pond and themselves discovered all drowned and deep under that

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lovely ice. Amid all their jostlings and their now-here's-a-secret-in-a-stage-whisper commotion stood Nick, my village driver, his quietness abounding. I heard Heeber Finn sing out from the phone.

I heard Nick start up and reply, " Just look at me, headin' for the door! "

Early on, I learnt that " headin' for the door " was no nerve-shattering process that might affront dignity or destroy the fine filigree of any argument being woven with great and breathless beauty at Heeber Finn's. It was, rather, a gradual disengagement, a leaning of the bulk so one's gravity was diplomatically shifted towards that far empty side of the public room where the door, shunned by all, stood neglected. Meantime, a dozen conversational warps and woofs must be ticked, tied, and labelled so next morn, with hoarse cries of recognition, patterns might be seized and the shuttle thrown with no pause for breath or thought.

Timing it, I figured the long part of Nick's midnight journey—the length of Heeber Finn's—took half an hour. The short part —from Finn's to the house where I waited—took five minutes.

But at last, down through the night forest thrashed the 1931 Chevrolet, peat-turf-coloured on top, like Nick; car and driver gasping, sighing, wheezing softly, easily, gently, as they nudged into the courtyard and I groped down the front steps under a black, starred sky on this night before the first night of Lent.

I peered through the car window at unstirred dark; the dash-light had been dead all these years. " Nick? "

" None other," he whispered secretly. " And ain't it a fine warm evenin'? "

The temperature was fifty. But Nick'd been no nearer Rome than the Tipperary shoreline, so weather was relative.

" A fine warm evening." I climbed up front and gave the squealing door its absolutely compulsory rust-splintering slam. " Nick, how've you been since? "

" Ah." He let the car bulk and grind itself down the forest path. " I got me health. Ain't that all-and-everything with Lent comin' on tomorra? "

" Lent," I mused. " What will you give up for Lent, Nick? "

" I been turnin' it over." Nick sucked his cigarette suddenly; the pink, lined mask of his face blinked off the smoke. " And why not these terrible things ya see in me mouth? Dear as gold-fillin's, and a dread congestor of the lungs they be. Put it all down, add 'em up, and ya got a sick loss by the year's turnin', ya know. So ya'll not find these filthy creatures in my face again the whole time of Lent, and who knows after! "

" Bravo! " said I, a non-smoker.

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" Bravo, says I to meself," wheezed Nick, one eye flinched with smoke.

" Good luck," I said.

" I'll need it," whispered Nick, " with the sin's own habit to be broke."

And we moved with firm control, with thoughtful shift of weight, down and around a turfy hollow and through a mist and into Dublin at thirty-one easy miles an hour.

Bear with me while I stress it: Nick was the most careful driver in all God's world, including any sane, small, quiet, butter-and-milk-producing country you name.

Above all, Nick stands innocent and sainted when compared to those motorists who key that small switch marked paranoia each time they fuse themselves to their bucketseats in Los Angeles, Mexico City, or Paris. Compare him, also, to those blind men who, forsaking tin cups and canes, but still wearing their Hollywood dark glasses, laugh insanely down the via Veneto, shaking brakedrum lining like carnival serpentine out of their car windows. Consider the Roman ruins; surely they are the wreckage strewn and left by those motor-biking otters who, all night beneath your hotel window, shriek down Roman alleys, Christians hell-bent for the Colosseum lion pits.

Nick, now. See his easy hands loving the wheel in a slow clock-like turning as soft and silent as winter constellations snow down the sky. Listen to his mist-breathing voice, all night-quiet as he charms the road, his foot a tenderly benevolent pat on the whispering accelerator, never a mile under thirty, never two miles over. Nick, Nick, and his steady boat gentling a mild sweet lake where all time slumbers.

Look; compare. And bind such a man to you with summer grasses, gift him with silver, shake his hand warmly at each journey's end. " Good night, Nick," I said, at the hotel. " See you tomorrow."

" God willing," whispered Nick.

And he drove softly away.

Let twenty-three hours of sleep, breakfast, lunch, supper, late nightcap pass. Let hours of writing bad script into fair script fade to peat-mist and rain, and there I come again, another midnight, out of that Victorian mansion, its door throwing a warm hearth of colour before me as I tread down the steps to feel Braille-wise in fog for the car I know bulks there; I hear its enlarged and asthmatic heart gasping in the blind air, and Nick coughing his " gold by the ounce is not more precious " cough.

" Ah, there you are, sir! " said Nick.

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And I climbed in the sociable front seat and gave the door its slam. "Nick," I said, smiling.

And then the impossible happened. The car jerked as if shot from the blazing mouth of a cannon, roared, took off, bounced, skidded, then cast itself in full, stoning ricochet down the path among shattered bushes and writhing shadows. I snatched my knees as my head hit the car-top four times.

Nick! I almost shouted. Nick!

Visions of Los Angeles, Mexico City, Paris jumped through my mind. I peered in frank dismay at the speedometer. Eighty, ninety, one hundred kilometres; we shot out a great blast of gravel behind and hit the main road, rocked over a bridge and slid down into the midnight streets of Kilcock. No sooner in than out of town at one hundred and ten kilometres. I felt all Ireland's grass put down its ears when we, with a yell, jumped over a rise.

Nick! I thought, and turned, and there he sat, only one thing the same. On his lip a cigarette burnt, blinding first one eye, then the other.

But the rest of Nick, behind the cigarette, was changed as if the Adversary himself had squeezed and moulded and fired him with a dark hand. There he was, whirling the wheel round about, over around; here we frenzied under trestles, out of tunnels, here knocked crossroad signs spinning like weathercocks in whirlwinds.

Nick's face; the wisdom was drained from it, the eyes neither gentle nor philosophical, the mouth neither tolerant nor at peace. It was a face washed raw, a scalded, peeled potato, a face more like a blinding searchlight raking its steady and meaningless glare ahead while his quick hands snaked and bit and bit the wheel again to lean us round curves and jump us off cliff after cliff of night.

It's not Nick, I thought, it's his brother. Or a dire thing's come in his life, some destroying affliction or blow, a family sorrow or sickness—yes, that's the answer!

And then Nick spoke, and his voice, it was changed, too. Gone was the mellow peat-bog, the moist sod, the warm fire in out of the cold rain, gone the gentle grass. Now the voice fairly cracked at me, a clarion, a trumpet, all iron and tin. "Well, how ya been since?" Nick shouted. "How is it with ya?" he cried.

And the car, it, too, had suffered violence.

It protested at the change, yes, for it was an old and much-beaten thing that had done its time and now only wished to stroll along like a crusty beggar towards sea and sky, careful of its breath and bones. But Nick would have none of that, and urged

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the old wreck on as if sniffing up doom or seeking Hell, there to warm his cold hands at some special blaze.

Nick leaned, the car leaned; great livid gases blew out in fireworks from the exhaust. Nick's frame, my frame, the car's frame, all together were racked and shuddered wildly.

My sanity was saved from being torn clean off the bone by a simple act. My eyes, seeking the cause of our plaguing flight, ran over the man blazing here like a sheet of ignited vapour from the Abyss, and laid hands on the answering clue. "Nick," I gasped. "It's the first night of Lent!"

"So?" Nick said, surprised.

"So," I said, "remembering your Lenten promise, why's that cigarette in your mouth?"

Nick did not know what I meant for a moment. Then he cast his eyes down, saw the jiggling smoke, and shrugged. "Ah," he said, "I give up the *other*."

And suddenly it all came clear.

The other one-hundred-and-forty-odd nights, at the door of the old country house, I had accepted from Huston a fiery douse of Scotch or bourbon or some such drink "against the chill." Then, breathing summer wheat or barley or oats or whatever from my scorched and charcoaled mouth, I had walked out to a cab where sat a man who, during all that long evening's wait for me to phone for his services, had lived in Heeber Finn's.

Fool, I thought, how could you have forgotten this!

And there in Heeber Finn's, during the long hours of lacy talk that was like planting and bringing to crop a garden among busy men, each contributing his seed or flower, and wielding the implements, their tongues, and the raised, foam-hived glasses, their own hands softly curled about the dear drinks, there Nick had taken into himself a mellowness.

And that mellowness had distilled in a slow rain, a rain that damped his smouldering nerves and put out the wilderness fires in every limb of him. Those same showers laved his face to leave the tidal marks of wisdom, the lines of Plato and Aeschylus there.

The harvest mellowness coloured his cheeks, warmed his eyes soft, lowered his voice to a husking mist, and spread in his chest to slow his heart to a gentle jogtrot.

It rained out his arms to loosen his hard-mouthed hands on the shuddering wheel and sit him with grace and ease in his horsehair saddle as he gentled us through the fogs that kept us and Dublin apart.

And with the malt on my own tongue, fluming up my sinus with burning vapours, I had never detected the scent of any spirits on my old friend here.

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" Ah," said Nick again. " Yes, I gave up the *other*."

The last bit of jigsaw fell in place.

Tonight, the first night of Lent.

Tonight, for the first time in all the nights I had driven with him, Nick was sober.

All those other one-hundred-and-forty-odd nights, Nick hadn't been driving careful and easy just for my safety, no. But because of the gentle weight of mellowness sloping now on this side, now on that side of him as we took the long, scything curves.

Oh, who really knows the Irish, say I, and which half of them is which? Nick, who is Nick, and what in the world is he? Which Nick's the real Nick, the one that everyone knows?

I will not think on it!

There is only *one* Nick for me. The one that Ireland shaped herself with her weathers and waters, her seedings and harvestings, her brans and mashes, her brews, bottlings, and ladlings-out, her summer-grain-coloured pubs astir and a-dance with the wind in the wheat and barley by night, you may hear the good whisper way out in forest, on bog, as you roll by. That's Nick to the teeth, eye, and heart, to his easy-going hands. If you ask what makes the Irish what they are, I'd point on down the road and tell where you turn to Heeber Finn's.

The first night of Lent, and before you count nine, we're in Dublin! I'm out of the cab and it's puttering there at the kerb and I lean in to put my money in the hands of my driver. Earnestly, pleadingly, warmly, with all the friendly urging in the world, I look into that fine man's raw, strange, torchlike face.

" Nick," I said.

" Sir! " he shouted.

" Do me a favour," I said.

" Anything! " he shouted.

" Take this extra money," I said. " And buy the biggest bottle of Irish moss you can find. And just before you pick me up tomorrow night, Nick, drink it down, drink it all. Will you promise me, cross your heart and hope to die, to do that? "

He thought on it, and the very thought damped down the ruinous blaze in his face. " Ya make it terrible hard on me."

I forced his fingers shut on the money. At last he put it in his pocket and faced silently ahead.

" Good night, Nick," I said. " See you tomorrow."

" God willing," said Nick. And he drove away.

★ ★ ★

When you have finished reading this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

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Versions in Verse

Readers tackled the job of packing the plots of Argosy stories into four-line verses with great spirit and gusto, and we had a record crop of entries in January. Our competitors are a poetically-minded group, and though we have had many lively responses to our requests in previous competitions for slogans, titles, letters, or definitions of *who* reads Argosy and *where*, it is in the versical contests that they really come out strong.

H. E. Bates's *Queenie White* was a great favourite but alas, many of the entries, though very funny, were not printable.

My Old Man's Trumpet called out a host of Dixieland technicalities; we had no idea Argosy readers were such jazz fanciers. F. G. Lott made a near hit with:

Jake blew my old man's trumpet,
Filled it with hot sweet rhythm;
Blew himself to heaven one day
And nearly took us with him!

We award two guineas to Miss Grace Curlender, Philbeach Gardens, S.W.5, who achieved the authentic Spiritual note:

Boy Gabriel, spare dat atom plant!
Dis trumpet not fo' you.
De fiery ball it killed dem all,
And jes' because he blew.

John Ormerod's story about the orphaned naguar inspired some gay verse, and our next two guineas are awarded to Mr. C. R. Cook, Guernsey, for his:

If you are a Naguar,
The higher up the crag you are
The less the fear of flood or colly.
Eggstinct? Nono! You're eggstra jolly!

Congratulations, too, to Mr. Cook and Miss Curlender for an outstandingly high overall entry.

Second prize of a guinea goes to Mrs. Vale, Woolston, Lancs., who galloped John Salt's *Place of Stones* into catchy metre:

Beware you intrepid explorers
Of seeking lost cities galore,
For you'll find that the Incas are terrible stinkers
Who fling stones at your head by the score.

(We forgive her for the fact that they were Aztecs, not Incas.)

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The Origin of Species

My God, it is intolerable to think of spending one's whole life like a neuter bee working, working, and nothing after all.—No, no won't do.—Imagine living all one's days in smoky, dirty London house.—Only picture to yourself a nice soft wife on a sofa, with good fire and books and music perhaps—compare this vision with the dingy reality of Gt Marlboro St.

Marry, marry, marry. Q.E.D.

CHARLES DARWIN, *Journal*

Bubble Bubble Toil and Stubble

Oh, somewhere he bubbles bubbles of milk
And quietly sucks his thumbs;
His cheeks are roses painted on silk,
And his teeth are sucked in his gums.
But alas, the teeth will begin to grow,
And the bubbles will cease to bubble;
Given a score of years or so,
The roses will turn to stubble.
He'll send a bond, or he'll write a book,
And his eyes will get that acquisitive look,
And raging and ravenous for the kill,
He'll boldly ask for the hand of Jill.
This infant whose middle
Is diapered still
Will want to marry
My daughter Jill.
Oh sweet be his slumber and moist his middle!
My dreams, I fear, are infanticiddle.

OGDEN NASH, *Song to be Sung by the Father of Infant Female Children*

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Ill couched

They were very taken up at this time with the study and practice of psycho-analysis. " Come and be analysed," was their parrot cry. " Let us rid you of the poison that is clogging your mental processes, by telling you all about yourselves. Now, suppose we begin with Fa, he's the simplest proposition in the house."

" What d'you mean, simple? "

" ABC to us. No, no, not your hand, you dear old thing, we've grown out of palmistry ages ago, this is science."

" . . . It's just as I had feared," said Jassy, " and shows a positively sub-human level—even Baby Josh did better than that. Oh, dear, sub-human, that's bad—"

Jassy had now overstepped the boundary in the perpetual game of Tom Tiddler's Ground that she played with her father. He roared at her in a sudden rage and sent her off to bed. She went off chanting, " paranoid *and* schizoid . . ."

NANCY MITFORD, *Love in a Cold Climate*

Times have changed, and now a lad
Who says merely " Mom " and " Dad "
Is, we've found, a trifle rare.
Most say " Hi," or " Hey, you, there! "

RICHARD ARMOUR

Telebathy?

Miners' teen-age daughters are objecting to father watching TV while he has his bath in front of the fire.

So the Miners' Lodge at Callerton, Northumberland, has appealed to the National Coal Board for bathrooms to be built in the 40 terrace houses which make up the village.

News Item

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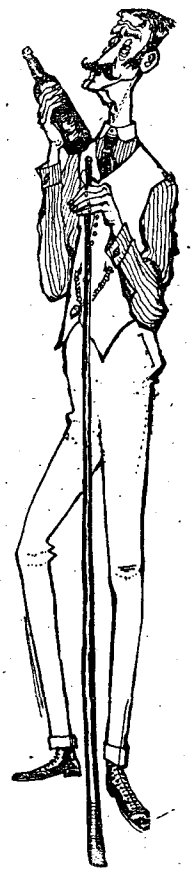
Keyed Up

In the darkening room
You sit beside the piano,
Where the music master
Stretches his shadow.
As he moves his hands,
In your mind ringing on its meals,
The rightful tunes to play
Are the sweet songs of birds
The yaps of dogs,
Hot water tapping in the leaden pipes,—
As a final consummation
Father arriving by the evening train.

SACHEVERELL SITWELL
Valse Estudiantina



Dragged Up

With Father, I felt often excited, often compassionate, but perhaps I had the same relationship to him as a slave to the Divine Caesar in Rome.

I never questioned his power of life and death.

Once when I was being irritatingly Band of Hopish and begging him to drink no more whiskey, he hurled me across the billiard room and I broke my arm. He set it very skilfully while servants were reviving Mother who had fainted; all the time he was bandaging it he was grinding his teeth and I was terrified. Then he held me in his arms and kissed me and whispered enchanting things to me.

I didn't hate him. I suppose I took it for granted.

When I told Havelock Ellis about these things sitting in the portico of the British Museum one day, he took a very poor view of my upbringing.

LEONORA EYLES,
The Ram Escapes

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DIRECT APPROACH

" By the way," Debby said
" are you married? "

BY RICHARD STERN

" THE General," said Lawyer Gregg, " has never been noted for his high boiling-point. He is of the old school, and he tends to take off with velocity."

" *Sound and fury, signifying nothing*," said the member of the State Planning Commission. " We've run into these stiff-necked old characters before. Why, when we started surveying the first highway—"

Lawyer Gregg shook his head. He sighed. " At least," he said, " bear it in mind that I warned you." He returned to base to report the failure of a mission.

The General was on the broad verandah of the big house. Green lawn rolled down to the river as it had rolled for four generations. Behind the house the land rose, wooded, wild, restful. The General's favourite shotgun—sixteen-gauge, and with the long barrels mounted—stood propped against the verandah railing. Lawyer Gregg eyed it fearfully.

" I'm afraid—" he began.

" You're always afraid," the General said. " You were born afraid. You're trying to tell me, I suppose, that they're going ahead with building their cavalry-word bridge."

" They are."

" And right here," the General said. " Spoiling my view."

Lawyer Gregg opened his mouth and shut it again. He nodded.

The General spoke another cavalry word. His head came up and he quivered; he seized the shotgun, brought it to his shoulder, fired one barrel off into the side woods. There were hurried scrambling sounds, and then, distantly, the snort of a motor starting up. The General set the shotgun down again. " They won't attack again today. Demoralized."

" John," Lawyer Gregg said. " John, you can't—"

" Can't I? " It was the voice that had, in its time, sent regimental commanders scuttling on their way, their tails between their legs. " Can't I? On my property, weren't they? Trespassers, weren't they? I warned them off, didn't I? Told them

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to take their surveying instruments and—" He stopped there. "They cut down one of my trees, a red maple."

For the second time that day Lawyer Gregg admitted defeat. He went in search of Debby, who was the General's granddaughter, his life and his soul.

She was in shorts (brief) and halter (briefer) and a pair of disreputable tennis shoes. She was squatting beside a box, looking down at a tabby cat and five mouse-sized offspring. "I'm offering my congratulations," she said. "Belinda has done it again."

Lawyer Gregg said, "The General—"

"I heard," Debby said. She stood up. "I heard, Uncle G, and I saw." She paused. "There are times when I feel like the princess in the tower. Modern style, of course. Now he drives men off with a shotgun."

Lawyer Gregg said, "I don't think that was what he had in mind. They were surveyors, for the bridge." For forty years he had wondered what it was that had prompted him to get himself mixed up with this family.

"They were men," Debby said with direct feminine logic. "One of them was a runt, it's true. But the other one, all I could see of him as he jumped through the bushes, that is—"

"This is serious," Lawyer Gregg said.

She put a small brown hand on his arm. "Of course it is, Uncle G." She looked down at Belinda. "When Grandmother was my age, she'd had mother; and when Mother was my age, she'd had me—no bargain, it's true, but she was in there trying. Now here I am . . ."

Lawyer Gregg took a firm grip on reality. "The bridge is coming. Nothing the General can do will stop it. He can't go on fighting progress."

"The bridge," Debby said. There was a dreamy look in her eyes. "That means men, doesn't it, Uncle G?"

He took it with dignity, drawing heavily on reserves built up over a lifetime. "I give up," he said. And then, out of loyalty, "I'll be available, in case of need." He turned oracular. "And there will be need. They'll send someone to protest about that shooting."

He was right. Debby was sitting cross-legged on the verandah, pushing patches through the barrels of the General's shotgun, when the first deputation arrived. This one was small, and pompous, wearing a toothbrush moustache.

The General blew him off the verandah with his first roar; off the property with his second.

It was small loss, Debby thought. "They'll send in the first

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eleven now," she said, and there was that in her voice which caught the General's attention.

"Eh?"

"They sent the small boy. Now maybe they'll send a man in to bat. Pass me the powder solvent."

"Now see here—"

"General," Debby said, "don't try to bully me. The stiff neck runs in the family, as you've often said." She finished with the powder solvent, ran a lightly oiled patch through as the final step; she fitted the barrels to the stock.

"Here you are, all ready for the next time." She paused. "You were a bit out in your calculations; they were moving faster than you thought."

"Harumph," said the General. "They were well out of range."

Debby said softly, "Oh-oh."

"Eh?" He looked at her. He swivelled round in his chair.

"Just as I said," Debby murmured. "Enter the first eleven; the varsity."

The varsity was not over-tall, but it was broad and solid, and it had a gleam in its eye. It came up the steps lightly, purposefully.

"General?" There was respect in the voice, but there was firmness too.

"I am," the General said.

"My name is Walters, General; Barney Walters. I'm the chief engineer on the bridge."

The General studied Barney. "Well?"

"There were a couple of my men—" Barney began.

"Skulking like rabbits through my woods," the General said.

"They were surveying—"

"Cutting down my red maples."

There was silence. Then, "I see." Barney said.

Debby said, "There was the pipsqueak, too; the one with the eyebrow on his upper lip."

Barney looked at her then for the first time, studied her quietly. He nodded. "That was a mistake. I should have come myself."

The General said nothing.

Barney said, "We're going to build the bridge, General. It's going to spoil your view; it may even change this part of the country." He paused. "That's all. We're going to build the bridge."

"Maybe," the General said. Then, "You may go, young man."

Barney nodded. There was a lightening in his face, in his eyes, a softening of the gravity, and something that was almost humour peeked out. "Yes, sir."

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They watched him in silence until he was out of sight.

"I would score that first round even," Debby said. "You countered nicely, General, but he may have had a shade the better of it on aggressiveness."

"There are times to attack," the General said, "and times to probe for weaknesses."

Debby stood up. She took the shotgun from the railing. "I'll put this back." She paused, looking down. "I'm glad those other two got away." She was humming as she went into the house.

She drove her small red sports car into the village that afternoon. Pete Roberts, the barber, was standing in front of his shop. "I hear tell," Pete said, "that the General's been shootin' at rabbits."

"In a manner of speaking," Debby said. She tarried. Pete was the reliable barometer of local opinion. "What else have you heard?"

"If you was a man, it'd cost you a haircut." He sighed. "They're settin' up a shack, down by the river."

"I saw it."

"They're bringin' a barge up from the city. They start drivin' piles tomorrow."

"Oh?"

"The fishermen don't like it. They say it'll scare the shad away. Billy Forbes's already sold his house. So's Peterson. The bridge approach'll go right through there—thirty, forty houses'll have to go."

"The bridge," Debby said, "will bring you more business."

"Don't want no more. If a man has to work all the time, what's it get him?"

"Money," Debby said.

Pete shook his head. "Ulcers."

Debby stopped next at the general store, bought a reel of thread which she didn't need. Mary Allison said, "Joe says stirrin' up the bottom of the river isn't good." Mary's opinions were always Joe's, faithfully repeated. "He says all that muck an' all is bound to bring disease."

"They dredge the ship channel every year," Debby said. "It doesn't cause any trouble."

"That's out in the middle. This'll be right by the shore. Joe says . . ."

Charley Noble, the village cop, was standing by her car when Debby got back. "You didn't put enough in the parking meter," Charley said, "so I dropped in a nickel for you."

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"Thank you," Debby said. She took out her purse and repaid him.

Charley said, "I just got through pinchin' one of them bridge fellows."

"Oh?"

"They better watch their step around here," Charley said. "They better not cut any capers."

"What kind of capers?"

Charley said darkly, "They just better watch their step, that's all. We didn't want them here in the first place."

And that, Debby decided, made the village opinion unanimous. She drove slowly, thoughtfully, back down to the river. There was a dusty grey jeep parked by the new shack. She pulled in alongside and got out. The shack was raw timber. The door was open. She went inside. Barney Walters was bending over a rough pine table, studying a blueprint.

"Hullo," Debby said, and she watched him turn slowly. "You put this up in a hurry."

"Yes." And he watched her quietly.

"Remember me?"

"I do."

"I've been in town," Debby said. "I've been conducting a one-woman public-opinion poll." She paused. "In popularity you rank just a little below Jack the Ripper."

"I've noticed. Is that what you stopped to tell me?"

"Partly. I just wanted to have a look at the first eleven on its own ground." She had her look; the results were satisfactory. "You start driving piles tomorrow?"

"We do."

"The fishermen don't like it. They think it will drive away the shad."

"It's possible."

"The townspeople say that when you start stirring up the bottom it will bring disease."

"Not possible."

"You don't unbend much, do you?"

"Should I?"

"I withdraw the question," Debby said. "I'll rephrase it: are you married?"

"No."

"Engaged?"

"No."

"Gun shy?"

The humour she had seen before peeked out now. "Not noticeably."

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"Good." She had another look, long and appraising; she was not disappointed. "I'll be seeing you."

He nodded, watching her still.

In the doorway she paused. "The fishermen hang out at the River Bar, at the foot of Main Street. The leading light is called Simpson, Tom Simpson."

He considered it. "Is that a warning, or a suggestion?"

"Just a statement," Debby said. She got into the car and drove away.

As she walked to the house from the garage she paused at Belinda's box. "Everything satisfactory?"

Everything was. The five mouse-sized progeny were huddled against Belinda's warm fur. Belinda stretched in languid contentment.

"I have an idea," Debby began, and there she stopped. Her grandmother, she decided, would have called the thought carnal.

She went to the verandah where the General sat. "Tomorrow," Debby said.

"Eh?" He came up out of his thoughts. "What about tomorrow?"

"You'll see." And then: "You'd better get your counter-attack ready."

The pile-driver began just before dawn; a tentative tap or two at the beginning, in the manner of a man with a mallet getting the range, and then a steady thumping rhythm, an almost musical note that carried clearly over the water and over the land.

Debby heard it, and she came up out of her dreams—pleasant ones—to lie quietly, warm and comfortable, and watch the first sunlight spreading into her room. Life, Debby decided, was good; and the race was to the swift, and the battle to the bold. It seemed to be that kind of morning.

The General thought otherwise. He was on the telephone bright and early, rousing Charley Noble, the village cop. "You hear it?" the General said.

"Why, sure. I mean, yes, sir."

"Then stop it," the General said.

Charley's voice mumbled something; the words were incoherent, but the tone was not—it dragged its heels.

"Public nuisance, isn't it?" the General demanded.

"Well," Charley said. And then, in a brighter, brisker tone, "Yes, sir."

"All right," the General said. "Abate it." He hung up.

He rang Lawyer Gregg next. "I want a—what-do-you-call-it—injunction."

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" John," Lawyer Gregg said, " you can't do that."

" Of course I can't," the General said. " That's why I rang you. A lawyer, aren't you? "

" There are times," Lawyer Gregg said, " when I wonder." But he was talking to a dead telephone. He sighed, and got out of bed.

The General and Debby were working on their grapefruit when the pounding stopped. The General listened, nodded, resumed his eating. And then the pounding began again, a few tentative taps and the steady thumping rhythm on a new, higher musical note. The General put down his spoon. He looked at Debby.

" How can I plan a campaign without information? "

Debby shook her head.

" Out you go," the General said. " Reconnaissance patrol. You understand? Don't engage the enemy; just see what he's doing, and report back."

The dusty grey jeep was still parked beside the shack. And there were other cars now, too; they lined the road. And there were men wearing goggles and heavy gloves, working at jobs Debby only dimly understood. And moored in the shallow water there were not one but four big barges, riding low, piled high with gear. From one of them the pile-driver thumped merrily.

Barney Walters was not in the shack, but the pipsqueak was, the man with the toothbrush moustache. He viewed Debby with something less than enthusiasm. And then Barney came in, a man in a hurry.

" Good morning," Debby said.

He stopped. He waited. He looked tired, but more solid than ever; he was unshaven, and the whiskers had the appearance of wire bristles.

" The General sent me—" Debby began.

" I expected it. He sent the village cop. Then he sent his lawyer. Now you."

" I'm strictly on reconnaissance, with orders not to engage the enemy."

" Except," Barney said, " with bright chatter." He seemed to gather himself, to force down the anger, and the fatigue. " Tell the General—" He stopped. " No. I'll tell him myself."

" I'll drive you," Debby said.

There was no answer. He was already gone, into the dusty jeep. She followed in the red sports car.

The General was still at breakfast. He leaned back in his chair and watched Barney come in. " Well? " he said.

" You're the kingpin here," Barney said. " But you're spoilt.

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You say, 'frog,' and the village jumps. I told you I was going to build this bridge. Your comic cop isn't going to stop me. Your lawyer isn't going to stop me either. Nor," he turned and glanced at Debby, who stood in the doorway admiring the scene, "nor is your bright-talking female type here. If I have to, I'll get tough and toss a few of your emissaries in the mud."

"Like that, is it?" said the General.

"It's like that," Barney said. He walked out without even a glance at Debby. The front door closed, and the only sound was the steady beat of the pile-driver.

The General folded his napkin, rolled it, and tucked it through his silver ring. "War," he said, "has been declared."

Only one more thing of note occurred that day. Lawyer Gregg wrestled with himself and with his conscience, weighing on the one hand the size of the fee the General was good for without argument, and on the other his duty as a lawyer to society as a whole. It was a tough struggle. In the afternoon he drove out to the big house.

To the General he said, "John, you are licked. You can't stop the bridge; you can't even slow it down."

The General snorted.

But Lawyer Gregg was not through. "You are trying to set yourself above society, and," he paused briefly, and swallowed hard, "and I won't have any part of it."

"The village doesn't want the bridge," the General said.

"The village," said Lawyer Gregg, "will get over that idea. When new business comes in, and new money, because of the bridge, the village will forget that it ever dug in its heels."

The General looked at Lawyer Gregg in a curious way. "Is that all you have to say?" The voice was quiet, too quiet.

"That's all I have to say," said Lawyer Gregg.

That night, inexplicably, the barge that bore the pile-driver broke from its moorings, moved out into the combined river current and tidal ebb, and gathered speed in the direction of the harbour and the open sea. It fetched up with a bang against a rock down near the palisades, tore a sizeable hole in its bottom, filled, listed, capsized, and sank.

The night watchman awakened beside the shack, towards dawn, with a large lump on the back of his head and no idea what had happened. What Barney Walters had to say to him is not a matter of printable record.

It was mid morning when Debby finally finished her self-appointed chore in the kitchen, and, to the intense relief of the cook, picked up her basket and went out to the little car. She parked, as before, beside the dusty jeep, and went into the shack.

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Barney was there. He was on the telephone, and his voice was angry. He hung up at last, turned round, and looked at Debby and then at her basket.

Debby said, " I feel rather like Little Red Riding Hood. That is, I mean . . ." Watching him, she ran out of words, a thing that had never happened before. It was unnerving. " Doughnuts," she said. " I—I made them."

" Did you? " His eyes, on her face, were hard, steady.

" I thought," Debby said, " that you might—you know—like them. I mean, men do, don't they? "

He said nothing. He merely sat and watched her.

" My, it's quiet," Debby said. " I mean, there's no noise at all. Isn't it? " And then: " Have you finished all the pile-driving? "

He stirred a little at that, a small movement of his shoulders, no more. " All right. You've had your fun." He pushed back his stool and stood up. " Now beat it." And he walked past her as if she was not there. Nor did he return.

She sat in the car for some time, trying hard to work it all out. In the end, the numbness wore off, and anger took its place. She went back into the shack, collected the basket, and returned to the car. If he wanted to be like that, for no reason, no reason at all, then she, Debby, was just the girl to accommodate him.

She drove back to the house, secure in her anger, and she was pulling into the drive when the doubts set in. She stopped. She backed out again. She headed for the village. Pete Roberts would know if anything had happened.

Pete Roberts did know. He told all, with a wealth of gleeful detail and broad, unrestrained gestures of the scissors, thereby imperilling the ears of the customer in the chair. " The General," Pete finished, " is a sly one. Tactics, that's what he's got."

" I don't believe it," said Debby.

And the more she thought about it, the madder she got. She skidded into place beside the dusty jeep this time, and she marched into the shack, the basket again in her hand.

Barney looked up. He opened his mouth, but she beat him to the words.

" Yes," she said. " I'm back." She slammed the basket down on the table. " There are your doughnuts. I hope they choke you. Do you honestly think that the General would stoop to stealing your pile-driver? "

He closed his mouth carefully. He looked at her for some time in silence. Then he nodded. " Yes."

" Well, he wouldn't. You've got a low mind."

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She turned round and marched out. The little car spun its wheels and leapt like a buck-rabbit.

She found the General in his study. "Did you," she said, "or did you not?"

The General put down his book. He took off his glasses. He looked old and tired. "The pile-driver?"

"Yes." And then accusingly, "You know about it."

"I do," the General said. "Gregg telephoned me." His voice lacked fire. "He didn't ask. He accused me."

"I'm asking," Debby said.

"Time was," said the General, "when I didn't give a hang what people thought about me." He paused. "I find now that I do. It's a sign, I think, that I've outlived myself." He raised one hand to silence her. "For the record, I did not have anything to do with the pile-driver."

The anger had melted away, all at once, leaving her empty and weak inside. "In the village they're saying you did."

"I know. Gregg told me that too."

"Barney thinks you did."

"I guessed that."

"Then who did it?" Debby said.

"I don't know," said the General, and all the old fire was gone.

For the third time that morning, Debby took the little sports car snorting down the drive and up the river road. She went past the shack and the three moored barges and the piled equipment without a glance. She parked on Main Street and she put no coin in the meter; Charley Noble would see that, and Charley would be there when she returned, and she wanted to see Charley.

In the meantime there was Mary Allison, in the general store.

"Joe says," Mary began, "that it's a good thing. He says it will show them they can't just come in and ruin our town. Joe says we ought to give the General a medal—not that he hasn't got enough of them already."

"The General didn't do it," Debby said. And then, before Mary could point out that Joe said that he did, "Have you thought what it's going to do for your business?"

"What?"

"The bridge. The people the bridge will bring, thousands of people who would never come through here otherwise. Have you thought of that?"

"Why—" She paused, uneasy in the presence of a new idea—"I'll have to ask Joe."

"Do," Debby said.

She went next to Lawyer Gregg's office, perched herself on a corner of the desk. "He didn't do it," she said.

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Lawyer Gregg leaned back in his chair. "I'd like to think that."

"You've got to think it, Uncle G, you've got to believe it." She paused. "He's an old man, just since this morning."

"He isn't young," Lawyer Gregg said.

"You know what I mean. He just sat there. He didn't even swear."

She went out into the street again. Charley Noble was standing beside her car. She got out her nickel for him.

Charley said, "The General showed them, all right." He winked broadly. "He made short work of that nuisance."

"He didn't have anything to do with it."

Charley opened his mouth and then shut it again carefully. "You're sure?"

"I'm sure. He told me so."

Charley took his cap off. He scratched at the bald spot. "Then who did?"

"I hoped maybe you could tell me."

Charley shook his head helplessly. "I thought the General had done it."

And so there she was, she thought, right back where she had started. She drove slowly towards the house.

The river was quiet, placid; out in the ship channel a freighter ploughed quietly northward; two fishing-boats tended shad nets; the dusty jeep stood beside the shack, and men moved around in their goggles and heavy gloves, but their movements seemed aimless, ineffectual without the pounding rhythm of the pile-driver.

They would bring in another one, of course, she thought, as soon as a tug could haul it up from the city; the work was no more than delayed. But the delay had finished any designs she might have had on Barney Walters. And the delay had made an old man out of the General. And the delay had— She stopped there.

"Well, I'll be damned," she said aloud. "As plain as the nose on Charley Noble's face." She stamped on the accelerator, and the little car snarled and took off in one long jump.

The General was still in the study.

"I know who did it," Debby said. She told him. "Now what I need is a campaign."

The General pondered. "It's best forgotten," he said at last.

"It is not."

"Eh?" And for a moment the spark showed; but then it flickered out again. He shook his head.

Debby said, "You didn't teach me to strike my colours."

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"Maybe a lot of the things I taught you were wrong." He paused. "I did a lot of thinking last night. What that young man told me about my being spoilt. What Gregg told me about setting myself against society. I used to think that 'Charge!' was the most important word in the language. Now I'm not sure. You live too long, and you begin to doubt."

"Well, I haven't begun yet," Debby said. She marched out to the little car.

Barney was just going into the shack as she pulled in. "You!" Debby said. "Come here." She was prepared to go after him, at need; but he came, broad, solid, light on his feet, unsmiling still. "The General," Debby said, "had nothing to do with your pile-driver. I asked him, and he doesn't lie."

"Is that why you came?"

"No." She took her time, because this was important and it had to be done right. "Yesterday you came down and told the General that you'd get tough if you had to. It was quite a speech. Was there anything to it?"

Barney watched her for a moment. Then he said, "What's on your mind?"

"I know who did steal your pile-driver and knock out your watchman." She paused. "I'll take you to him. If you're interested. If yesterday's speech wasn't just so much talk."

"A dare? Fun and games? Idle amusement for the idle rich?"

"Maybe I deserve that," Debby said. "But it's not a dare. It's a statement. *I made it once before.*" And she saw that he understood.

He put one foot over the low door, stepped in, and seated himself beside her. "Let's go."

And something in his voice had changed; something tight was gone; and his eyes, watching her, were no longer quite so hard. They did not speak all the way to the River Bar at the foot of Main Street.

It was dim outside, and it smelt vaguely of fish. But there was ample light to see the half dozen men at the bar, idling over their beer.

"Tom," Debby said. "Tom Simpson." And Simpson turned round.

He was a big man, with black hair and a fisherman's weathered face. He wore faded dungarees and a blue shirt and sneakers without socks.

He looked at Debby and he looked at Barney. "Lost somethin', bud?"

"Yes," Barney said. "A pile-driver."

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" Too bad," Simpson said.

" Could be," Barney said. " We'll try it and see."

Simpson said, " Cocky little fellow, isn't he? " And he looked round at the others at the bar. Someone sniggered. " Well," Simpson said then, " I suppose we'll have to oblige him."

And it happened, all at once, faster than Debby could move, or even see. The group at the bar broke—flowed, really—a moving mass of men. And Barney stood for a moment, and then went down, under the swarming mass. And Debby heard her own voice, raised, saying, " Stop it! Stop it! "

But she might as well have been shouting at the sea; and not even the heavy salt-shaker which had appeared mysteriously in her hand—and with which she hammered impartially at any head within range—did any good. She was almost sobbing in her impotence.

And then, behind her, the door banged against a wall, and a new voice, pitched to command, rolled into the battle and halted it. The General was there, and the General was no longer old, no longer tired; and he held his favourite shotgun in loose readiness, and he looked from man to man, and the lash in his voice flayed them.

" A pack of mongrel dogs," he said. Nobody denied it. " A pack of cavalry-word mongrel dogs." He looked then at Barney. " Is there one of them you want to dirty your hands with? "

There was a cut on Barney's cheek, and three buttons were gone from his shirt. His chest rose and fell deeply. He was grinning. " There is," he said.

" Pick him out," said the General. He made a small gesture with the shotgun. " The rest of you will go over and sit down and behave yourselves." They did. In silence. " And now," said the General, " get going."

It was a good fight. The village has grown, now that the bridge is up and finished, but the natives still date events by " the day that engineer fellow whipped Tom Simpson down in the River Bar."

The General watched, a connoisseur, approving what he saw. Debby watched, the salt-shaker still clenched in her small brown fist. The fishermen sat quietly in their ringside seats. And in the street outside, a crowd gathered, but their view was impaired and so their stories tend to be fanciful. But it is true that the final punch, a straight right hand, drove Simpson back to the bar and across it, opening two beer taps and bringing down with a satisfying crash a good share of the bottles that lined the shelves.

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Barney stood quietly, breathing deeply, his hands loose at his sides while he waited. But behind the bar there was no movement, only the gurgle of the open beer taps. It was then that the crowd in the street parted, and Charley Noble came cautiously through. He paused, and he looked to the General for instructions. The General gave them in a clear, firm voice.

"The carrion is back there. Drag it away."

The shack by the river is gone now, and the pile-driver no longer rings with its musical note. And the General is gone, too —rest him—but there are still those who were present in the street and saw the three come out.

The General was on the right, as befitted his rank, the shotgun in the crook of his arm. His step was firm, and his head was high, and there was neither age nor fatigue in his eyes.

Debby was in the middle. She still clutched her salt-shaker. Her eyes were bright, and there was a tremble to her chin that came from an emotion midway between laughter and tears.

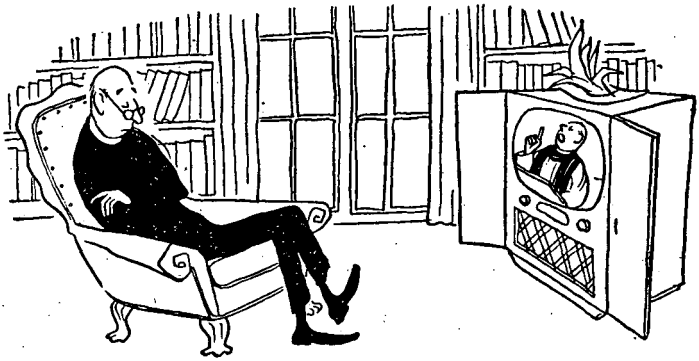
Barney was on the left. One eye was partially closed and the cut on his cheek was already turning purple and his shirt flapped like a scarecrow's around his naked chest. But he seemed aware of none of this. He was smiling, looking down at Debby as they walked, and someone heard him say, "They were good doughnuts, first-rate."

And Debby said, "Were they?" And then, "I'm glad."

Which made no sense at all.

Lawyer Gregg, on the edge of the crowd, summed it up. "Now," said Lawyer Gregg, "I have seen everything."

The General heard. He straightened even a trifle more. "Harumph," said the General. "A man has the right to change his mind."



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A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

SOURCE SEVEN

More than ghosts
haunted those shadowy cellars

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

HOW curious, and how different, are the threads that form the pattern. A drunken crane-driver at Tilbury Docks; a pink-cheeked young man fishing off the south bank of the Gironde; a middle-aged gourmet with a house of rose-coloured brick and ashlar stone in the hills above Maidenhead.

On a fine morning in September Superintendent Costorphine was studying the entries in his ledger, under the cross-reference of diacetylmorphine, which is better known as heroin, a product of morphia, which is itself a by-product of opium. The book lay open at a page headed with the numeral 7.

Scotland Yard has no separate Narcotics Bureau. Nevertheless, there are men in the Central Office, and Costorphine was one of them, who had come, by accident or design, to specialize in the ramifications of the drug traffic. They are co-ordinators. They work hand in glove with departments whose special interests are Undesirable Aliens, Unlawful Night Clubs, Prostitution, Procuration, and Assault with Violence; occasional flowerings of the same shoot.

Superintendent Costorphine was tall, thin, white, and untidy—"like a wax candle in a draught," said Superintendent Hazlerigg, who admired, but could not love him. He had the mind of a chess master and the patience of Job. Which was as well, because he was fighting a battle in which victory was impossible and the most that could be looked for was a measure of success.

He was speaking to Hazlerigg of this. "The real trouble," he said, "is that the stuff is no longer manufactured in England.

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It was tried, in the 'twenties. Morphia, heroin, and cocaine. When we put Kid Manning, the negro, inside, they packed it up. It's all made in the Middle East now."

"I expect the authorities are more broad-minded there," agreed Hazlerigg. "Why do you class that as a trouble? I should have thought it was a good thing."

"No," said Costorphine. "If you can hit the producer you can stop his line once and for all. Now that we can't touch the producer we have to spread our efforts and go for the carriers. A lot of them are little men—stewards and deck-hands and lascars. They're a plague, but they never carry more than tiny quantities. It's the big, regular, well-organized sources that matter."

He looked down at the ledger in front of him. It was called Costorphine's Source Book—or, by the young and irreverent members of the department, Mother Costorphine's Cookery Book. In it, numbered serially, could be found set out all the known details of ways and means in which supplies of unlawful narcotics were entering—or were thought to be entering—the country.

About some of these sources everything was known, and in these cases a neat red line drawn at the foot of the page indicated one more chapter closed and one more hole stopped. About other sources, information varied from the moderately complete to the extremely sketchy.

Page seven was practically blank.

"By the way," said Hazlerigg, his mind reverting to the reason that had brought him in to Costorphine's room. "We've found a lot of that jewellery."

They had been discussing a lady of title, in whom they shared an interest. She had disappeared from her family home three months before, with some of her own and some of her family's jewellery, and had just been picked out of the gutter in Dean Street.

"She's been selling it and pawning it," he went on. "She didn't get much for it but the transactions were honest as far as they went. I expect the family will buy it back. She'd no money on her at all. I don't think there's much doubt how she spent it, poor girl."

"No," said Costorphine. He himself never said things like "poor girl" or "poor man" about victims of drugs; any more than he said "poor fellow" when he had captured an unwary opponent's Queen. "What was the cause of death?"

"Exposure and weakness."

Costorphine pinched his long upper lip. "There's no doubt

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in my mind," he said, "that the heroin in her handbag came through Source Seven."

"It's a marvel to me how you keep 'em apart," said Hazlerigg. He got up and peered down at the traffic in Whitehall.

"Changes in manufacturing methods, chiefly. This stuff was made almost exactly two and a half years ago. It started to appear on the English market last month. That's always been the peculiarity of Source Seven. A time-lag of twenty-seven to thirty months between manufacture and disposal. It's very odd, that. Usually they're only too keen to get it on the market, you know, and pick up their profit."

"Is Seven a big source?"

"Big enough to be worth stopping," said Costorphine. He was not given to overstatements.

"By the way," he added, "did you hear that we had found Thomas?"

"Thomas who?"

"Tiny Thomas."

"Oh, him," said Hazlerigg. "When you say 'found' I suppose you mean—"

"Yes. Quite dead. He'd been strangled."

This is where the drunken crane-driver comes in. His name was Ricketts and he had been celebrating the return home of his eldest son from Cyprus; celebrating with such serious concentration that when he came on duty next morning he was not only still drunk, but too drunk to realize it. With the result that he had succeeded in dropping a steel girder weighing five tons from a height of sixty feet. Fortunately, no one was underneath it at the time, but the loading-jetty had disintegrated as if a bomb had hit it.

Two days later a diver had gone down to assess the damage. While down there, he had observed what looked like a roll of cable wire. The scour was carrying it slowly along the river bed towards him. Fearing that it might run foul of him, he had stooped to push it to one side and had noticed two feet projecting from one end.

But for this chance, the little fish and the crabs would have had time to finish what they had begun, and in the end there would have been nothing left but a cocoon of rusty wire, rolling backwards and forwards as the tide ebbed and ran.

As it was, the police were able, with some difficulty, to reconstruct and identify the remains of Tiny Thomas who was a vendor of newspapers and, in addition, a most useful and successful police informer.

There the matter might have rested, but for the fact that

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when the experts examined Thomas's coat they took particular care to look out for a secret pocket which they knew it contained. In it they found a sodden piece of cardboard which, under the influence of oblique photography, yielded the single word, POYAK.

Since Thomas was known to have been working for some time on Source Seven—to which he said he had some sort of lead—the matter was referred eventually to Superintendent Costorphine.

"What does it mean?" asked Hazlerigg, when all this had been explained to him. "It sounds like a racehorse."

"No one knows what it means," said Costorphine. "It's evidently a name that Thomas heard—or more likely misheard—and since he thought it important he wrote it down and cached it in his inner pocket."

"Po-yak," said Hazlerigg. And then, "Poy-ak." It sounded equally silly either way.

"My first idea was that it might be the name of a boat—perhaps some small motor craft—or a bungalow on the sea or river. Any of those would have made sense against a smuggling background."

"Have you got anyone in particular on it?"

"I haven't been able to spare anyone at the moment," said Costorphine. "Why?"

"I was talking last night to Haxtell. He's got a Detective Petrella in one of the Divisions. An unusual background. Talks Arabic, among other things. A lot of these drug carriers are lascars from the docks, aren't they? Might be useful."

"Hmph," said Costorphine ungratefully.

"Give the boy a run," said Hazlerigg. "It'll be a nice change from picking up drunks on Highside. I won't let him do anything drastic without asking you or me."

Detective Constable Patrick Petrella was something of a joke at Headquarters. Hazlerigg had borrowed him off the beat when he had discovered that he spoke Arabic, and had used him as interpreter in a piece of business which he was engaged on at the Docks. He had discovered, with surprise, that his youthful-looking assistant had other accomplishments. Besides Arabic, he spoke French and a little Spanish. He had been brought up in Cairo where he had been apprenticed to a firm of safe-and lockmakers. He was clever with his hands. He could play the banjo and knew something of subjects as far apart as wireless telegraphy and wine-making.

Petrella had spent an enjoyable two months at Central Office where he had come under a certain amount of fire from the old

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hands. He had accepted the leg-pulling with the same equanimity as he accepted everything else.

"Do some *thinking* first," said Hazlerigg to this young man. "If you strike a line, hunt it yourself and report results. There's a Thames Conservancy List of motor boats and motor cruisers which you might start on. If you get hold of anything, tell Superintendent Costorphine or myself before you do anything silly."

Petrella saluted gravely and withdrew.

He was back the next morning. "Could you find out, sir," he said, "whether Source Seven could have anything to do with France?"

Hazlerigg telephoned Costorphine. When he had done, he said, "Yes. The stuff starts in the Levant, but there are some indications that there is an intermediate stage in France. Why?"

"Po-yak," said Petrella. "It's what an Englishman might make of Pauillac, if he overheard it."

"Yes," said Hazlerigg. "So he might. Is Po-whatever-its-name-is on the coast?"

"In a way, sir. It's on the south bank of the Gironde—that is, the mouth of the Garonne. Quite large boats go past it, I believe, on their way up to Bordeaux. I don't think they stop there. It's not a large place. Perhaps if I could go and have a look-round . . ."

The thought of sending a very junior detective constable direct to Bordeaux had not even entered Hazlerigg's head. He opened his mouth to say, "Certainly not," and then closed it again.

"I'll speak to Superintendent Costorphine," he said at last. "Meanwhile, get on checking those motor boats."

Surprisingly, Costorphine supported the idea.

"Normally," he agreed, "we should ask the French Police to co-operate. But what exactly are we going to ask them to do? Go to Pauillac and look for—what? If there's anything actually sticking out they'd have noticed it before."

"They're usually very helpful," agreed Hazlerigg.

"Of course. They're very co-operative. But unless we can give them rather more to go on, I'm afraid it'll be a routine inquiry and a nil return."

"All right," said Hazlerigg. "Let's let him go, then."

And to Petrella he said, "Look here, son. You're going as a tourist. You've got a fortnight to produce some return for the public money that's being spent on you. I'll give you an introduction to the Commissaire at Bordeaux, but don't use it unless you have to. Behave like a tourist—have you got any hobbies?"

"I used to fish quite a bit."

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"Excellent. Take a fishing-rod. It'll be a boring existence but I expect you'll survive. And just what are you looking so pleased about?"

"Some of the finest claret in the world, sir, comes from Pauillac."

"Well, you won't be able to buy much of that on your allowance," said Hazlerigg. "Keep your eye on the fishes."

Which brings us to a young man fishing on the Garonne.

Patrick Petrella never before remembered such a feeling of entire and absolute contentment. He was seated in a clump of reeds. It was not a very good place for fishing, but it was an excellent place for observation. Already he was in love with the misty greys and greens of the Médoc and the broad silver-grey river which ran past his feet.

Away across the river, on the extreme right of his view, showed up the church and citadel of Blaye. In front of him spread the willow-covered flats of the Ile Saint-Louis, with its cheerful-looking lighthouse, like a single-funnelled liner. On his left lay Pauillac jetty.

The warm sun was tempered by a breeze which rippled the water. The tide was on the ebb and a single battered tramp steamer was coming up against it.

Petrella settled himself more comfortably on his old mackintosh and fell into a trance which was part happiness, part the feel of the sun on his back, and part genuine tiredness. It was during the evenings that he did his work, and he had not seen his bed until the very small hours of that morning.

"Garçon très sympathique," declared Madame Jolliot of the Pension Maritime. "One can observe from his accent that he is not a Frenchman. A Belgian, perhaps."

"His passport is British," said Monsieur Jolliot.

"There are all sorts of foreigners in Britain," said Madame. "It proves nothing. To my way of thinking he is not British. A Pole, perhaps. He is not reserved."

He was certainly not reserved. He took his evening drink at one or more of the four main riverside cafés. He joined in all public arguments. If there was a party he could usually be relied on to make one of it. He was young, and free with his money, and as soon as the ice had been broken there had been no lack of parties.

It was, perhaps, a fortunate moment, being the last few days before the vintage. Soon everyone would be too tired at the end of the day to do more than eat and tumble into bed. At the moment there was an interval of leisure. The last row had been

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weeded, the gear overhauled, the casks scrubbed. So there was time for parties.

It was a social routine that left Petrella a little fatigued, but all was compensated for by the long, dreamlike mornings beside the river.

The tramp steamer was abreast of him now. It was alone on the wide reach. Boats usually came in with the flood, instead of battling up against the ebb. She must, he reflected, be running to a schedule that brooked no delay.

A man appeared on the lower well deck. Petrella saw a dark face above white overalls. The man was some sort of galley-hand. He was dumping a scuttle of rubbish, which he emptied over the side of the boat, down-wind. Refuse, boxes, paper, tins flew out. A bag burst as it hit the water and Petrella saw potato peelings. He grinned. You couldn't litter up the sea the same way as you could the land. There were too many scavengers about. Seagulls were already wheeling over the trove.

Soon only one large cardboard carton was visible. It floated high in the water, with a sort of lopsided dignity, and the wind was driving it across the current. Petrella wondered if it would sink before it hit the reeds.

At that moment he became aware that there were other parties interested. Out of a creek, a hundred yards downstream, came a dinghy. There were two boys in it. They handled the boat skilfully, pulling into the current and judging their distance. Another type of scavenger, thought Petrella. Seagulls and boys. He didn't think they would get much for their pains. The way the box floated, he imagined it was empty.

The boat was alongside now. The two boys shipped oars and leaned over. The boat dipped as the box came over the side.

Petrella started to wind in his line. His mind was no longer on fishes. He was trying to work out how a light-looking cardboard carton, which floated high out of the water, could need two strong boys to handle it; and how it could cause a boat to dip when taken aboard; unless it was much heavier than it looked; in which case why had it not sunk? Unless, of course, it had been scientifically buoyed: say, with cork, or compressed air.

He packed up his fishing-gear, folded his mackintosh over his arm, and walked back down the river path. When he came to the head of the creek he saw that the dinghy was already back at its moorings, and empty. The boys were lashing a tarpaulin over a small handcart. He could see that there were nets on the cart. Since there was no sign of the carton he felt safe in assuming that it was under the nets.

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The boys glanced up as he passed. Both of them were brown-faced and black-haired, and they looked very wide-awake citizens. Petrella threw them a good-day to which the older boy replied with the conventional " Monsieur." Petrella passed on. He had no intention of following them. Such a course would have been worse than stupid. It was, moreover, quite unnecessary.

After luncheon he fell into conversation with Monsieur Jolliot. There has never been any real need for a system of land registration in France. Every inhabitant of the commune knows to whom every inch of land belongs. The fields and vineyards with their infinite divisions and subdivisions are spread out for all to see, like a living family tree, a record of marriage, birth, patrimony, and descent.

The creek and the landing-stage belonged to the owner of Château Maurice-Epinard. It was an interesting example, said Monsieur Jolliot, of acquisition through the female line, the male line being extinct. The Château itself stood some three kilometres away. No, it had not a classified " crû," but produced a very good patrician wine, of the second class. Two boys? Undoubtedly they would be the sons of Clairambaud, the facteur, who acted also as maître de chai, or cellar master. In a big Château like Latour or Mouton-Rothschild the offices would be distinct, but not in a small one. Both boys were well known.

" Full of espièglerie," said Madame Jolliot.

" Full of impertinence," amended Monsieur Jolliot. " Out at all seasons in their little boat. Some day they will come to no good."

Petrella agreed with him and retired to his room for an afternoon nap. What he had to do next needed careful thought.

He got up at half past four, had a cup of chocolate, and then strolled out towards the Château. After a short walk he left the main road and followed a broad track, between rows of vines. When he reached his destination he saw that " Château " was a courtesy title. It was a large flat house, overshadowed by trees, with a stuccoed front and sham turrets. The long windows were shuttered, and there was no smoke coming from the chimneys.

The cellarage buildings formed a large separate block, with its own entrance and forecourt. There was some life here. Two men were lounging in the front of the court and a woman, standing in a kitchen doorway, was talking to a third man, a bulky red-faced person, with the look more of a Gascon than a Bordelaise.

Petrella guessed that he would be the maître de chai, and went up to him. He knew that it was not uncommon for visitors to

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come to a château at vintage time. At the larger châteaux there would be a stream of them. They were perhaps less common at a small, isolated place like Maurice-Epinard.

"Monsieur Clairambaud?"

"The same," said the red-faced man.

"I wondered if—"

"You wish to see our cellars. Certainly. This way, if you please."

They passed up the courtyard. "You have walked out from Pauillac? You are staying there perhaps?"

"Yes."

"From England?"

Petrella agreed that he was from England. They had reached the door leading down into the cellar. Clairambaud held it open. As Petrella turned to go in he noticed, pressed to a nearby window, the face of a boy. The expression was an unpleasant mixture of malice and anticipation. The woman had gone inside and the other two men had closed up silently behind him.

He realized that he had not been quite as careful as he imagined.

"Go ahead," said Clairambaud. His face was still smiling but Petrella saw, for the first time, his great butcher's hands. He walked down the steps.

"Straight ahead." It was an order. The three men followed him closely. They were walking down an aisle, dimly lit, between rows of barrels. At the far end there was a grating. Clairambaud pushed past him, took out a key, and opened the door.

"Our inner cellar," he said, "where we keep some of our most precious vintages. It is useful also for a multitude of other purposes. Please go in."

"I suppose you know what you are doing," said Petrella.

"Of a certainty," said the man calmly.

"My friends at the hotel will be inquiring after me when I do not return. I informed them, of course, where I was going."

"I think that is a lie," said Clairambaud. "My son tells me that you spoke to no one before leaving. In any event, when you do not return, they will think, no doubt, that you are at some party—busy asking questions. That seems to have been your occupation on all other evenings. To ask questions."

Petrella had nothing to say to that.

"By tomorrow morning, no doubt, some inquiry will start. Believe me, my little detective, they will have to search long and closely if they wish to find you then."

The two men standing behind Monsieur Clairambaud laughed.

"One other thing. If you shout and scream it may be necessary to tie you up with cords. That will be very uncomfortable for

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you. And you will, in any event, have wasted your time. At this point you are three metres below the ground and the walls are of great thickness."

"I shall not shout," said Petrella.

"I was sure of it," said Clairambaud. He walked out, snapped shut the lock of the grille with his big key, and turned out the light. Then he turned it on again for a moment to say, "Look out for the spiders. They grow, in this darkness, to the size of a man's hand."

Then he turned it out again. The three men tramped away. When they reached the steps the cellar light went out as well, and Petrella heard the heavy outer door being shut and bolted.

He sat for quite a long time. It was not that he was afraid of the spiders, whose existence he doubted, but he decided to wait until his breathing was normal and the first little flickerings of panic had died down. Then he could start to work things out.

Slowly the darkness cleared to a dim, shadowy dusk. There was no direct source of light in his cage, but he realized that the huge cellar outside was not quite black. There must be ventilators, up near the roof, to let in the necessary air, and they let in some light as well. He could see the bars of his door black against the lesser darkness beyond. The atmosphere was quite fresh.

What a fool he had been. He had imagined he was being clever. He had only succeeded in being obvious. They had suspected him all along. They had not even minded—that was the galling part—they had not even minded him seeing how the goods came ashore from the steamer. They had known only too well that he would come to the Château. Everything was arranged. He had no doubt at all that a bundle would go back on the handcart that night, and that in the early hours of the morning a heavily loaded dinghy would pull out from the jetty into midstream.

That, or something like it, was their intention. One thing mattered. Would they visit him again before night? Even if they intended to kill him that night they would hardly dare to move him before midnight. More probably it would be later than that. Would they visit him first? In the circumstances, they would be unlikely to waste food and drink on him.

All the same, he thought they would look in once—just to make sure that all was well. Perhaps at about nine or ten o'clock. That gave him three hours to make his preparations.

He was confident that he could open the door. It would take time, but it could be done. The lack of light did not bother him, because you always have to open a lock by touch and not by

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sight. He would need two strong, thinnish pieces of iron, bent to the correct angle.

In a clumsy great lock like this one, the retaining spring would be very powerful. The sort of spring that needed a thick key with a long shaft and a wide handle to lift it at all. Little pieces of bent wire were going to be no use. You would need good steel. In his hip pocket he had a relic of his service with the Egyptian company, a pair of pliers with a fine saw-edge in one handle and a triangular file in the other. There was plenty of metal in the wire racks around him. He selected a cross-strut of half-inch angle-iron, out of sight of the door, and started to work on it.

It took him two hours to make the necessary tools. When he had perfected them, and knew that he could open the door quickly, he hid them in the dust at the foot of the cellar wall. Then he waited.

The waiting was the hard part. He might be making a stupid mistake by waiting at all. Equally, he could spoil everything by starting too early. He decided to compromise. He would give them until eleven o'clock.

It was ten to eleven when they came again—the same three men. This time they searched him. They found the pliers, but made no comment on them. Petrella got the idea they were emptying his pockets less to deprive him of chances of escape than as a first step in stripping all marks of identity from him. His tailor's tabs would go next. Then perhaps his fingers and his face.

One man had brought a can of coffee. "You had better drink it," said Clairambaud.

"Later," said Petrella.

"As you wish."

When they had gone he sniffed at the contents of the can and decided that there was more in it than coffee. He emptied it into the corner.

At eleven-fifteen he opened the grating, and stepped out into the cellar.

The door at the head of the steps offered him nothing. It was massive and was bolted on the outside.

There was an inner door, at the top of a ramp, in the left-hand wall, and this was unlocked. It led into the chambre des cuviers, where the fermenting-vats stood, filling the entire space from floor to ceiling. They were empty now, scrubbed and ready for the coming vintage, but the room stank of bygone grape harvests. Unfortunately, its outer door was bolted too.

He made another circuit of the two cellars and confirmed that

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there were only two ways out. Then he sat down again to think.

He might hide in the cellar. But for how long? Or he might conceal himself behind the door and try to slip out, or fight his way out, when the men came for him. It seemed a slender chance.

And, at the back of his mind, eluding him, was the vague impression that he once knew of a way out. It took him fifteen minutes to think of it, and then it was a chance thought about scrubbing the vats that brought it back to him.

In olden days they had to be scrubbed by men with brushes who were lowered through the opening at the top. In modern vats, however, there was often a device in the back at ground level, enabling a man to get through. He would drag a pressure hose with him and so the work would be done in a tenth of the time. Petrella prayed that the march of science had reached the Château Maurice-Epinard.

It had; and a minute later he was inside the vat itself. He had armed himself with a pole from the cellar, and with it he pushed at the big trapdoor in the ceiling of the vat. It swung up under his pressure. So far, so good. The chance existed, but at the moment it was three clear feet out of reach of his fingertips. He needed something to stand on.

The empty barrels in the main cellar would be tall enough set on end, but even if he could move them, they were too wide to get into the vat. He stumbled round in the dark for ten minutes and discovered two brooms and a rake, but nothing more.

Twelve o'clock.

Finally, sweating now, he went back into his prison and emptied the bottles from one of the racks. Then he set to work at loosening a section. It was a very bad time indeed before it came away from the wall. But it was thin enough to be squeezed through the opening in the vat, and just strong enough to take his weight.

The last stage was a nightmare. He dared place very little weight on the rack, and he had to stand on it and lift a heavy trapdoor, using a thin wooden pole. That done, he had to pull himself up through the opening. His arms were trembling with fatigue, and twice he thought he would drop. It was only the realization that if he failed he would never be able to try again that got him through onto the floor of the loft.

That was almost the end of his difficulties. The loft door was bolted, but on the inside. Five minutes later he was in the open, creeping between the vines, heading for the main road.

It was seven in the morning, in London. Superintendent

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Costorphine had been dragged from his bed at six, but he seemed neither surprised nor excited. He listened silently to the outline of Detective Petrella's adventures.

" How did you get back, then? " he said.

" I got a lift in a lorry to Bordeaux," said the battered young man. " I got in touch with Commissaire Michel and he took me to the airport. We were lucky. The plane from Marrakech had to touch down and he got me a seat in her. Did you get my telephone message? "

" I got nothing."

" There's a forest fire south of Paris. A lot of the lines are down."

" I expect that's it," said the Superintendent. He pondered for a moment. " Let me have your ideas about it," he said. " What do you think these people do with the stuff—after they've picked it up out of the water? "

" I found out," said Petrella, " that a lot of the vineyards—particularly the smaller ones that don't go in for château-bottled wines—will sell you a barrel or more at a time. They arrange the shipping and the customs clearance. You just pay the money, and in due course the barrel or barrels are delivered."

" I see," said the Superintendent. " Your idea is that they hide the stuff in the wine and export a barrel or two to a contact on this side."

" Yes, sir. If they used a plastic container—or something of the sort—they could regulate the weight so that it wouldn't either float or sink. It would be suspended, so to speak. It would be almost impossible to detect without actually draining the cask."

" You would appear to have a natural talent for smuggling. Perhaps you can tell me why the man who receives it leaves it alone for two years. Just plain caution, would you think? "

" Oh no, sir," said Petrella earnestly. " Once a claret is in cask you must *never* touch it for two years. You'd do endless harm to the fermentation. After two years you draw it off and bottle it. That would be the time to get the stuff out, without hurting either it or the claret. In 1952 you get a 1950 heroin."

" Hmph—" said the Superintendent. " We're in the realms of guesswork there. The first thing to do is to ask the customs people to give us a list of private buyers from this particular Château. It can't be a very long list. You'd better go to bed."

" You wouldn't like me to—"

" No, no," said the Superintendent testily, " I can handle it now."

Which brings us to a lovely house of rose-coloured brick and

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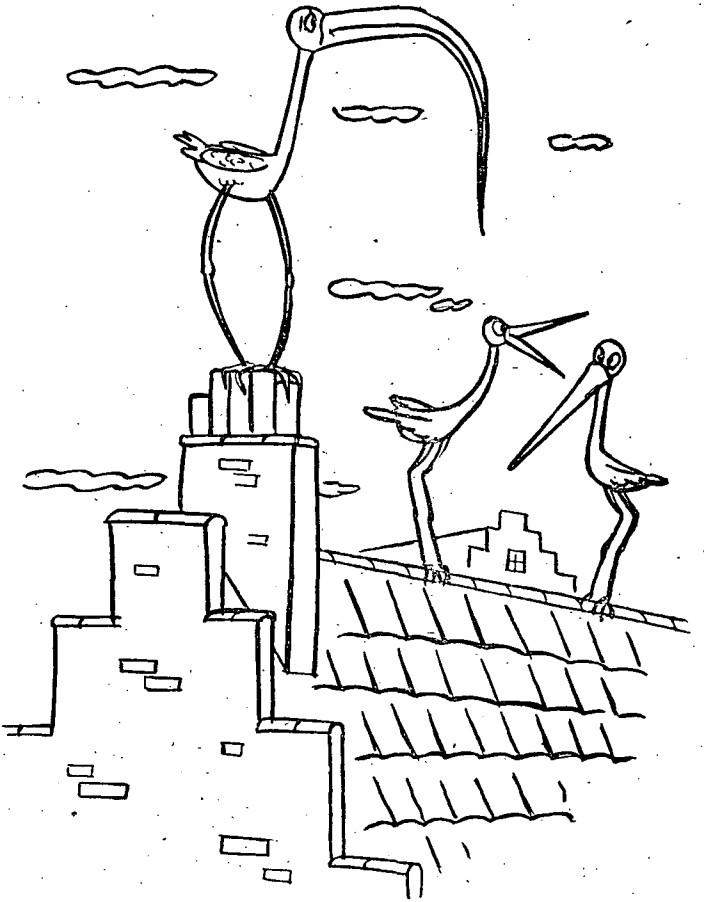
ashlar stone in the hills above Maidenhead; and a portly man with a white face and red lips, who started by protesting, then screamed with rage, and ended by whimpering. He cried some more when he heard what the Judge had to say to him.

And a written commendation from the Chief Officer of Police for Detective-Constable Petrella.

And one more neat red line in Superintendent Costorphine's book.



Poor Herbert—he drew two sets of quins yesterday

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WOMEN MEAN TROUBLE

It was man's country—
no place for a girl

BY EDWARD LINDALL

NEWLAND sat cross-legged on the scorching ground, watching the girl, who sprawled face down in weariness in front of him. Yesterday and the day before, he had resented her, but now he was beginning to feel sorry for her. Not because anything about her had changed, but because he knew what lay ahead.

He watched her thoughtfully, a frown on his lean, angular face, wondering how much strength lived in the slim body in its man's clothes.

Then he glanced at his wristwatch, and his expression became brisk and purposeful again.

"Time to move," he said curtly.

Barbara Richards pushed herself up on hands and knees slowly, then sat back on her heels. Her face was caked with dust and her grey eyes were slightly bloodshot.

"If only there were some shade," she said, in a flat voice. "We could rest out of the sun and walk by night."

"We'll drink next halt," Newland grunted. "You'll feel better then."

"Perhaps we'll find some water."

"Out here?"

Newland's voice was heavy with a tired mockery. His cracked lips smiled mirthlessly and his arm, describing a wide arc, invited her to look at the miles of sun-tortured desert that lay around them.

The heat shimmered and danced, making cruel mirages of lakes and waterfalls; sucking the dust into willy-willies that twisted swiftly and erratically away to the horizon. The only vegetation was spinifex, ugly, stunted bushes that clung grimly to a worthless life. The iron-hard ground was covered with a film of dust and millions of gibbers, stones that had been worn smooth by countless years of wind and sun.

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Barbara Richards shuddered slightly. "If we dig, maybe we'll find some."

"The only water you'll find is in this can," Newland said harshly. He rose slowly, picking up the water tin at his feet. "And there'd be plenty to see us through if you hadn't knocked it over. Now stop talking about it."

Her shoulders straightened and her firm chin rose a fraction. "It helps me to talk," she said coolly.

"It also helps to make you thirsty."

"I'm thirsty anyway," she said. "I might as well talk."

"All right," Newland grunted. "Talk."

He turned and began to walk westward into the slanting sun, keeping his head down to minimize the glare. His face was grave in the shadow of his wide-brimmed hat, but it was the determined gravity of a man who had examined all the facts and given himself a desperate, fighting chance.

Newland knew this wild Australian northland with the peculiar intimacy of a bush pilot who flew anything to anywhere.

Anything to anywhere. He had it painted in big, bold letters on the fuselage of his plane. So when the freight agent at Alice Springs had asked him to fly Barbara Richards north to Bluey Coulson's hunting-camp, there was nothing he could do about it but take her aboard. Well, nothing he could do when she was watching him with those steady grey eyes and a faint smile on her full lips, that said as plain as speech that she knew what was going through his mind.

He grinned derisively now as he thought about it, for what had been in his mind was an old saying of the north—"Women mean trouble."

The words fell into the rhythm of his muffled footfalls, drumming their irony; for in a land where usually one mistake was the last, they had already made three. They had got lost trying to follow Coulson to the native village where he had gone to shoot a man-eating crocodile; they had broken their jeep axle trying to cross this desert, and about an hour ago Barbara Richards had spilt all but two pints of their precious drinking-water.

"I still think we should have stayed with the jeep," she said now. "Coulson could easily track us to the jeep."

Newland looked up quickly, his brown eyes sharp with annoyance. "He won't know we're lost until he gets back to camp. That'd be at least three days. Maybe four. Another day to track us makes five without water."

"He *could* return earlier."

"But he won't."

"How can you be so sure?"

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"Look," Newland said flatly, "work it out. The natives'll throw a feast when he kills the croc. He'll stay for that. It's good fun. He could even stay a couple of days. The note he left told us to stay put. He might even go on somewhere looking for game. There's nothing to make him hurry back to camp."

"Only the fact that he thinks we'll be there waiting."

Newland tramped on for a while without answering. He was a tall man, whip-lash thin, and his legs moved with an easy looseness that seemed tireless. His face was set with impatience at her absurd faith in Coulson, but he hesitated to dispel it because she might need faith like that to carry her through. Then, with characteristic swiftness, he decided there was nothing to be gained by bolstering false hopes.

"You'll have to get rid of your servant complex," he told her, deliberately insulting. "Because you're rich, because you've paid Coulson to help you shoot buff without danger, it doesn't mean he's waiting at the end of a servant's bell now. This time you're on your own."

"You put it so charmingly," she said.

"I've given it to you straight," Newland snapped. "What d'you want? Fairy-tales about princes on white horses riding to the rescue?"

"No," she said bitterly. "I'd just like to feel we had a chance."

Newland glanced at her again and there was something about her, the way she walked with her chin up and shoulders squared, that brought a gleam of grudging admiration into his eyes. He felt a mild regret for his curtness. The desert was no place for anyone on foot, let alone a girl who had spent all her life among the lush amenities of a city.

"We've got a chance," he said quietly. "Doing it this way, the Overland Telegraph runs north and south. If we keep due west we must strike it somewhere."

"Then you phone for a taxi," she said, with heavy sarcasm.

"I'll smash an insulator," he went on, patiently. "Then we wait for a linesman to come out from a repeater station."

"You've a plan, of course, if he doesn't come?"

"He'll come," Newland asserted. "When a line goes dead they move fast. There's a sort of tradition about it. They've saved a lot of people, that way."

"All right," she said. "I'll accept that." She gave a tight, bitter laugh. "There's nothing much else I can do."

They went on without talking then for nearly an hour. In that time the sun dipped enough to slant under their hat brims

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and lay a burning strip across their chins. The fine dust puffed up from their feet, stuck to their sweating faces, and drifted into their eyes, making them red and brittle-lidded. Then Barbara Richards stumbled on a spinifex bush and plunged forward on hands and knees. She got slowly to her feet as Newland moved to help her.

"No," she said. "I'm all right."

Newland eyed her closely. She looked very tired. "We'll rest a while," he said.

"I'm all right," she repeated. "I tripped."

"I know," Newland said quietly. "But let's rest for five minutes."

"I'd rather keep on," she said. "It's automatic now."

"That's when you need to take a break." Newland shucked his pack and squatted on it. "We'll rest five minutes every hour."

She stood looking down at him uncertainly. "I'm holding you back."

"Nonsense," Newland said. Then he eased the sharpness of his tone with a slight grin. It hurt his lips. "I need a rest, too."

She gave him a half smile in return and Newland noticed that her lips were puffed, and the lower half of her face was an angry red where the sun had struck under her hat brim. She sat down slowly, moving her body in sections, as though each stiff joint and muscle had to receive a separate order to move.

"You still think we'll make it by tomorrow night?"

"Sure," Newland said. "Sure."

She picked up a gibber, balanced it lightly on her fingers, and massaged it thoughtfully with her thumb. Then she said quietly, "I don't believe you, of course."

Newland didn't move. His face remained impassive, but a quick gleam of alarm flickered in his eyes.

"You rate me pretty low, don't you?" she said, watching him so closely that his face burned. "I'm such a coward you don't dare tell me the truth."

Newland was shocked. He couldn't even begin to understand how she had guessed he had been keeping the truth from her, and he didn't know what to say.

"It'll be more than two days, won't it?" she said, with quiet insistence.

Newland nodded. "About two and a half."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"No need for two of us to worry," he said.

"It wasn't because you thought I'd panic?"

"Don't let's start fighting," Newland said uncomfortably. "We're in a tough spot."

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"I know that," she said, calmly, without rancour. "And it'll need a combined effort to get us out."

"Time we moved," Newland said, rising to cover the red embarrassment that was flooding his face under the dust. "We've been here five minutes. Longer, if anything."

"You haven't told me about the food," she said. "We must be short there, too."

Newland sat back on his pack and looked into the calmness of her grey eyes. It surprised him to find such calmness in them. He hadn't expected it.

She was very pretty, he thought, despite her man's clothes and the mask of dust on her face. He had known that before, of course, and now he found himself thinking perhaps it was her prettiness that had made him resent her so much. It would have been easy to take a mannish woman, one of those massive, striding amazons with a throaty voice and shoulders like a wrestler.

But a slim, cool girl like this stepping into the wild northland had seemed incongruous to the point of mockery.

For this was a man's country; and not even for all men. Only the toughest could survive, and that was why the old-timers said, "Women mean trouble." It wasn't so much that they were women, as that they weren't strong enough to wage the unending fight against the wilderness.

And, thinking that, Newland felt sorry for her again. He admired the courage she was showing now, but he was sorry for her because he was sure it wouldn't be enough. Another day of thirst and, later, of hunger and she would begin to break down. The calmness in her eyes would give place to fear and he would have to fight to keep her going.

He had seen it happen to a man once, years before, and the memory of it burnt in his mind. He had just folded up. It had been like striking a tent and letting the smooth, strong outlines of the canvas collapse on the ground.

"What about the food?" she said. "You haven't told me."

Newland gave her a direct stare. "There's not much," he said. "Two tins of meat and three packets of biscuits."

"What does that mean? In terms of hunger?"

"We'll be short the last day. But that shouldn't matter."

"With luck, you mean?"

He nodded. "With reasonable luck." He rose slowly to his feet. "It's more than time."

"Don't we have a drink?"

"Next halt," he said. "We're not really thirsty yet."

She shrugged. "We've got different standards. I'm drier than the dust."

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So they started forward again and walking became a vast bitterness. A grudging fight against the desert; against the fine clogging dust that floated up from their feet, against the malignant sun that was so fierce it had melted the clouds and bleached the colour from the sky; against the unending monotony of spinifex and earth and sand, the petty, infuriating insistence of the gibbers underfoot.

Their mouths dried out and their tongues became swollen and rough. Their eyes burnt and they had to narrow them and still they burnt. They saw mirages of lakes and waterfalls, cool and beautiful, and Newland became afraid of the next day because once or twice he saw Barbara Richards momentarily quicken her steps at sight of a mirage. He had to watch that, because they were the desert's stock-in-trade to weaken you and bring you to the verge of insanity.

"Don't lick your lips," he said. "They'll crack worse."

She lifted her head slowly and looked at him. Her grey eyes were strained and bloodshot, peering through the dust on her face like burning slits in a mask.

"It eases them."

"You won't think so by tomorrow," Newland said. "Tie a handkerchief round your face if they worry you."

Then he glanced at his watch and, miraculously, it was time to rest. They flopped straight to the ground, more tired than they had ever been, now that the need to drive themselves forward had lifted for a space.

"Here," Newland said, uncapping the water tin. "One mouthful. Don't swallow it right away. Let it soak in."

"It's hot," she said. Her voice was low and harsh with the dryness of her throat.

"It's also wet," Newland said. "One mouthful. Remember."

They both drank, holding the air-hot water in their mouths for a long time before swallowing. Then Newland screwed the cap back on the tin and took out his cigarettes. He had one halfway to his lips when he remembered. Slowly he replaced it and tucked the packet back in his pocket. His mouth would be dry soon enough without smoking.

Then they were standing again and setting their faces into the slanting sun. All through that afternoon they walked, resting for five minutes at the end of each hour, then gathering themselves, and plunging on. Newland carried the water tin and the one pack containing their meagre food.

Time coalesced under the blazing sun and ceased to be a progression of minutes. Even the hours ran together, the brief halts no more than uncomfortable pauses during which the heat

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was fiercer because they were not moving. And at the end of each halt they had to start their legs again, forcing them into the dogged, automatic rhythm of near-exhaustion.

When the sun dropped suddenly over the edge of the desert to cancel their long shadows, Newland didn't at first understand that the day was over. Then he stopped, head down and legs spread wide, unable to accept the fact that he could rest at last. When he looked up, Barbara Richards was still walking.

" Stop." He tried to call sharply, but his voice was thin, and little louder than a whisper. He tried again, but there was no saliva in his mouth. He forced his legs into movement again and took her by the arm.

" We'll stop now." She didn't seem to hear. " Listen to me," he said. " We'll stop now."

With a gesture of ineffable weariness she pulled down the handkerchief she had knotted round her face. " For how long? "

" Until tomorrow."

He took his hand away and slid his arm round her shoulders. Pity for her weariness rose in him like a flood. " Here. Lie down. I'll start a fire. We'll eat and then we'll sleep."

" Can I have some water? " Her voice was almost inaudible. She sat with her arms across her knees and her head cradled. " I couldn't swallow without it."

" Sure," Newland said. He uncapped the water tin. " Only a mouthful," he cautioned. " And hold it."

She put the tin to her mouth and Newland watched her intently. Anxiously. This was the test of her will-power. If she could take only one mouthful and put the tin down, he would know that she was far from giving in. His breath snagged in his anxiety, held for a moment, then flowed smoothly again as she handed him the tin. He put it to his lips without speaking and when he felt the water in his own mouth he realized just how much of a test she had passed. Slowly he screwed the cap back.

" We'll have some more after we eat."

" Can I help? "

" No," Newland said. " Get some rest."

" I feel I should help," she said, softly. She hesitated. " You've done so much."

" Stretch out and think about the Ritz Grill," Newland replied.

The smile he gave her in the darkness hurt his lips but he didn't mind. Suddenly there had come a warmth of companionship between them and he felt good about it. He felt a small, ridiculous pleasure as he thought about it and it stayed with him as he bent stiffly and collected the dried and broken branches

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round the spinifex bushes. In a few minutes he had enough and a bright fire leapt from the ground. He dropped a tin of pressed meat into the middle of the blaze.

"An old bush trick," he explained. "There's enough fat in the tin to stop the meat burning. It doesn't really cook, but at least it'll be hot."

"Hot and wonderful," she said.

She was still sitting up and the firelight danced on her face. The day's grime was thick upon it and her dark hair was tangled. Her lips were puffed and cracked with sunburn, but to Newland her beauty was still there, miraculously preserved. And more than that, there was courage in the tilt of her chin and in her sun-tired eyes.

Newland opened the tin, using his hat to protect his hand, and they ate the hot meat with their fingers. They ate it slowly and silently, savouring each mouthful as if it had been rare steak. They licked the grease from their fingers with regret and each had two mouthfuls of water.

Then Newland took out his cigarettes.

"One won't hurt now," he said, offering the pack across the dying fire.

"They really should be cigars," Barbara Richards murmured, "after such a meal."

When their cigarettes had been smoked right to their fingers, they lay down, a few feet apart, and slept almost immediately. The moon floated into the sky and poured light on their faces, but their sleep was so drugged with tiredness that they didn't move.

Later, the air became brittle with a cold that squeezed dew from it and the chill struck to the bone. Only then was there a stirring, and when Newland awoke at dawn he found himself huddled against Barbara Richards, but still so cold that his search for warmth had been instinctive rather than practical. His clothes were wet with dew.

He sat up carefully, not wanting to wake her until he had a fire going, and a sharp, agonizing pain shot through his right leg just below the knee. He clapped his hand hard over the spot, stifling the exclamation that rose to his lips. Then he pulled up the trouser leg, slowly and gingerly.

The squashed body of a desert scorpion fell to the ground, and on his leg was an ugly red lump.

Swiftly and harshly he fought off the panic that seized him. He was appalled by this new misfortune, but it had to be met squarely. The scorpion's bite was not fatal, he knew, but it

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was poisonous enough to cause delirium, and that, in their present position, could amount to being fatal.

He forced himself to think calmly. First he had to open the bite and drain off as much poison as possible. They had no knife, but his eyes fell on the empty meat tin by the ashes of the fire. He scrambled forward on hands and knees, gritting his teeth against the agony that stabbed his leg. He paused for a moment with the jagged tin in his hand, disciplining himself, then slashed it twice across the bite marks. With his two hands tight around the leg, he began squeezing the blood down.

To his relief it flowed freely. That much was good. But he knew some of the poison must have escaped his rough surgery; how much he wouldn't know until the day was older. There was nothing clean enough to use for a bandage, so he sat watching the blood ooze, thinking of the day ahead and about the girl still sleeping behind him on the ground.

His first instinct was not to tell her. It was going to be tough enough keeping her on her feet without scaring her to death. Then he realized he had to say something. If he became delirious, it would be far worse for her not knowing what had caused it. But he decided to keep silent until the last moment, because there was a faint chance that he had got rid of most of the poison and it wouldn't be so bad. He reached down and gently shook her by the shoulder.

"Help me with the fire, will you?" He gave her a small, encouraging grin. "We'll eat the last tin of meat. It'll put some strength into us. We can have biscuits tonight."

She sat up, stiff and shivering. "I'm too frozen to move."

Newland clasped her hand and hauled. She came up too quickly, fell against his chest, and his arms went around her instinctively to save himself from falling. Her face was just below his chin and she was looking up, smiling at him with her lips and her eyes. Newland felt a strange thrill of excitement run through him and he nearly kissed her. Then she lowered her gaze and he let her go. But the soft feel of her body and what he had seen in her eyes stayed with him.

In a few minutes they had a fire going. It spluttered slightly with the dampness of the dew, but the spinifex was dry inside. Newland threw the remaining tin of meat into the flames and stood watching it, taking all his weight on one leg.

The pain from the bite was still acute, and his leg muscles had stiffened. But it was too early yet for the poison to be affecting him otherwise.

"What's wrong with your leg?" Barbara Richards asked suddenly.

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Newland looked at her steadily. She had beaten him again. "I got bitten," he said. "By a scorpion."

Alarm tensed her face for a split second, then her wide eyes met his steady ones and he could see her forcing herself to be casual.

"Does it hurt badly?"

"No," he lied. "Just stiff. It'll be all right soon as we start walking."

Then he looked away quickly, as a spasm of pain ran up his leg. He kicked the tin of meat out of the fire with a swift, controlled violence and ripped it open. They ate the hot, greasy meat quickly, had a mouthful of water, and Newland slipped on his pack.

"I'll carry the water," Barbara Richards said, reaching for it.

"No," Newland said. "Save your strength for later."

"But your leg—"

"I said it's all right," he interrupted irritably. He was instantly ashamed of his curtness, but a headache had started to wrap a tight band round his forehead and his body felt torpid. "You can carry it later," he added, in apology. "Soon as I'm tired."

"All right," she said. "That's a bargain."

They headed west again, with the early sun on their backs and the clean, dew-washed air in their nostrils. No dust rose from their feet. There was a new-born freshness about the desert that made it almost beautiful. But by the end of the first hour the sun had a bite to it, and when they took their five-minute spell they both knew it was going to be bad.

They were hungry and thirsty, but there would be no food until nightfall and no water until midday. And Newland's leg was stiffening, the pain across his forehead was stabbing, and his heart was making funny jumping movements. He was sweating profusely.

"Are you sure you're all right?" Barbara Richards asked him softly.

There was a strained look on her face now the light had increased. She had tried to clean it by wetting her hands in the dew and rubbing them over her cheeks and around her neck. The attempt hadn't been successful but Newland thought she looked wonderful. There was still a calmness in her grey eyes. And although her lips were puffed and cracked, they were held firmly and he could see the graceful curve of their true line.

"Sure, I'm all right," he said, trying to sound confident. "Leg's a bit stiff. That's all."

"You said it'd be all right once we got moving."

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"There's plenty of time," he said with a wry grin. "We'll be walking another ten hours yet."

She made a small, mock gesture of protest. "Don't put it into words. It sounds impossible."

Her face suddenly shifted out of focus for Newland, then jumped back again in sharp outline. He remembered how close he had been to kissing her, little more than an hour before, and now he wished he had done so. He thought about that for a moment, but couldn't seem to get anything straight in his mind. It was shifting about too much.

Then one thing emerged that was more important than anything else. He had to keep her going throughout the day. He had to help her, to prevent her breaking down when the going got too tough. He was filled with pity for her again, but this time it was mixed with another, deeper emotion that defied analysis.

He began to blame himself for getting her into this dreadful situation. If he had refused to fly her into Bluey Coulson's camp this would never have happened. If he had refused to let her talk him into trying to follow Coulson . . . Then the old saying came back into his mind to tease him, "Women mean trouble." He saw that Barbara Richards was looking at him strangely.

"Let's move," she said. "We've been here nearly ten minutes."

Newland was dimly aware that she was helping him to his feet. He could feel her hand under his arm, but her body and face were floating a long way off. He felt sick and a great pain ripped tearingly through his stomach. He wanted to lie down on the ground and not get up again, but somehow, through the pain and the cloudiness that troubled his brain, he knew he had to keep going.

They pushed on all that day, halting when Barbara Richards called a halt, stumbling to their feet and plodding on again when she gave the word. Newland was delirious most of the time and she had to steer him with a hand under one elbow. He lived in a vast fantasy of pain, in which only one thing stood out clearly, and he kept repeating it to himself aloud, intoning it with an almost ritualistic monotony.

He had to guide Barbara Richards to safety. He had to keep going because without his protection the northland would crush her. She was his responsibility.

She heard his ramblings with tears in her eyes at first, then with a warm feeling of happiness that seemed quite natural, even in their predicament. It was agonizing, heartbreaking work for

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her, but she never wavered. Her tongue was swollen and her lips, despite the protective handkerchief, were cracked so deeply that they bled every time she moved them. Her eyes were almost closed with dust and the glaring sun.

But she kept driving herself westward, keeping rigidly to the schedule of rests, never cheating by so much as a minute.

When night dropped with tropic suddenness over the desert there was no strength left in her body. She made Newland stretch out on the ground and flopped beside him, in utter exhaustion. They lay there nearly an hour, then she sat up and uncapped the water tin.

This would be their last drink and she hesitated a moment before taking it. Then she took a long pull, held the water in her mouth, and slowly swallowed. She knelt beside Newland, lifted his head and carefully dribbled some water between his lips. She took the biscuits from Newland's pack, divided them, and ate her share. They were tasteless and hurt her mouth, but she felt a little better for them.

She sat beside him for a long time, battling with hopelessness and fear, fighting the day's agony step by step and trying to forget that it was all to do again with the new sun. She was worried and fearful for Newland. Something had started between them that she wouldn't name, wouldn't even let herself think about too deeply, and it made his sickness harder to bear.

The moon came floating up and she was still sitting there, close to tears. The light shone on Newland's dust-grimed face with its beard stubble and cracked, half-open lips, and she remembered the way he had driven himself all day for her sake. He had thought he was leading her, holding her courage together, and now she knew that it was quite true. His blind courage had set her a challenge and she had met it.

She leaned forward and kissed him softly on the lips and then the tears came silently, ploughing deep furrows through the grime on her cheeks.

It seemed that she had been asleep only a few minutes when someone was shaking her arm. She opened her eyes with difficulty, because they were inflamed and sore. Then she thought they were playing tricks. Newland seemed to be squatting beside her, big and substantial in the half-light.

"Dan!" She reached out and touched him. "Dan!"

"Time for breakfast," Newland said, covering her hands with his own. "I can offer you three biscuits."

Tears brimmed her eyes.

"Dan," she said, "you're all right?"

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"Fine," Newland answered, grinning. "Only need a steak and a pot of coffee."

"All you needed yesterday was a walk. That's what you said."

"I got it, too," he said. "And I've sweated the poison out."

"It was frightening," she said quietly. She didn't need to say more, for all the unspoken things were in her face.

Newland looked at her for a long time with a curious gentleness. "I was pretty sick," he said at last. He looked back over the desert towards the rising sun. "How far have we come?"

"I don't know," she said. "Not so far as the first day. We were slower. But we walked all day."

"Ten, maybe fifteen miles," Newland said, thoughtfully. "We can't be far from the Overland now."

"You're not just saying that?"

"No," he said.

"Well, I'm ready."

They shared the six remaining biscuits because Newland refused to move until she had eaten. Then they licked the dew that beaded the outside of the water tin and sucked what moisture they could from their clothing. All of it didn't amount to a drink, but it helped a little to cool the thirst that raged in their mouths.

They were both weak now, but the thought of the nearness of the telegraph line gave them new strength. Newland's leg was still stiff and his body felt as though it had been kicked over every square inch. But his mind was clear.

They walked slowly, stumbling over the slightest unevenness in the ground, not talking because it was too much effort. The sun grew warmer with a swiftness that seemed almost an eagerness to consume them. The dew dried out and dust began to rise petulantly from their heavy feet. Newland felt the tightness returning to his sunburnt face, and he knew that if Barbara Richards's estimate of distance was far out this was going to be a bad day. A very bad day. If they hadn't reached the Overland by noon the chances were they would never make it.

The nearness of disaster sharpened his thinking and he began to realize the debt he owed the slim girl struggling along at his side. He felt ashamed of his doubts about her courage, of his egotism in thinking that he alone could beat the northland and guide her to safety.

"Women mean trouble," the diehards said; but they could never have known a girl like this. He turned his head slowly to look at her, and marvelled again at her strength. He wanted to say something, to tell her how much he admired her, but the

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words would not come. He remembered the touch of her hand on his arm, how she had called him "Dan," the way she had looked at him, and he couldn't believe what his instincts were trying to tell him.

Then he saw a glitter far ahead. A quick gleam that ran along above the ground. Excitement strummed in him. He shut his eyes tightly, then opened them again. He had to wait nearly a full minute before seeing the light again. He grasped Barbara Richards by the shoulder, his fingers digging in with a hard urgency.

"Look," he said. "Look ahead."

"What is it?" Her voice was dull with disinterest.

"Copper." He laughed aloud. The sound was harsh and exultant. "Beautiful copper wire shining in the sun."

She stood quite still for a moment, then looked up at him, big-eyed. "The Overland?" Her voice was little more than a whisper.

He nodded and somehow she was in his arms, her head cradled against his chest and her body racked by vast sobs. He stroked her hair tenderly. "Your Overland," he said gently. "You brought us here."

"I wanted to stay with the jeep," she said. "Remember?"

"All I remember is yesterday," Newland said. "And what you did."

She leaned back and looked into his face, her strained eyes beautiful with tears. "There was nothing else I could do," she whispered. "How could I leave you behind?"

She curled an arm round Newland's neck, drew his head down, and kissed him on the mouth. She kissed him softly because their lips were painfully cracked, but the look in her eyes was a deep caress. Newland put both his arms round her shoulders and drew her to him, and for a while they forgot their weariness, their hunger, and their thirst.

★ ★ ★

CUSTOM-MADE?

The French Customs men soon got to know us and waved us through without glancing into the car, but their Italian opposite numbers became increasingly surly. They charged us ridiculously high duty even on a Camembert or a loaf of bread, so it soon became a point of honour to smuggle at least one item every time we crossed the border. Betty had the highest score with two small melons tucked inside her blouse—which gained murmurs of "*quel beau balcon!*" from the kindly French . . .

JOAN GRANT, *Time out of Mind*

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FAVOUR FOR LEFTY

When it was over
the widow came up and kissed him

BY CHARLES EINSTEIN

IN our family, we have an expression—"Do a favour for Lefty"—that, like the private sayings you have in your own family, is very hard to translate so that outsiders will understand. Even today, a generation later, I am not as qualified as, say, my father, to use this expression with its exact nuance and meaning—though I have used it time and time again—because I wasn't there when it happened. I was five years old, and five-year-olds don't go to funerals.

What happened was that Mr. Ghiblikian, who lived across the street from us in Boston, died. He died of old age. He was in his eighties, and he had had a long and a full life, and he died peacefully. My grandfather and my father and my Uncle Leon all went to the funeral, and they went in two cars. This was because Uncle Leon had bought a new car the day before, and he insisted on driving it every chance he got. My grandfather refused to drive anywhere in a car that had Uncle Leon behind the wheel, so Grandfather went with my father; and Uncle Leon went in his own car, a trifle bitterly.

"Why won't you go in the same car with me?" he'd asked Grandfather.

"Because you don't look at the road when you drive," Grandfather said.

"I have to look for the signs," Uncle Leon said.

"You can't drive and look for signs at the same time," my grandfather said, and that was that.

The funeral service was held for Mr. Ghiblikian at one of the largest chapels in Boston, and after that all the cars got in line to follow the hearse to the cemetery. My father and my grandfather got back from the burial before Uncle Leon, and they were both upset about something. From their conversation, often recounted, I have been able to reconstruct at least dimly what had happened.

"He did what you told him," my father said. "He stopped looking for signs and kept his eye on the road."

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" So he got lost and never showed up at the cemetery! " Grandfather shouted. " A fine time to stop looking for signs! "

" Look," my father said. " There was a whole crowd of mourners. One more wasn't missed. And of the three of us—you and me and Leon—Leon knew Mr. Ghiblikian the least. It isn't as if he was as close to him as you were."

It was not typical of my father to stick up for Uncle Leon this way, but in later years I have understood that Grandfather was upset over the death of his friend and that my father was trying to soothe him.

He wasn't too successful. " Signs! " my grandfather shouted. " Signs! He didn't even have to look for signs! All he had to do was stay in line in the parade "—" parade " was not the right word for a funeral procession, but my grandfather did not know the right word and meant nothing disrespectful, and my father, wisely, did not correct him—" and he couldn't miss! "

" Maybe he had a flat tyre," my father said.

" Brand-new car! " my grandfather bellowed. " It goes two miles, a flat tyre? "

" He might have run over a nail."

" So while he's looking for signs he'll look for nails too! "

There was the sound of a key in the door. My Uncle Leon came in and found himself looking down the barrel of an accusing finger.

" You! " my grandfather bellowed at him.

My father said, " Leon, what happened? "

" It's hard to explain," Uncle Leon said.

" It's hard to explain! " my grandfather said, in savage mimicry. " Your brother and I, we were at a funeral today. Where were you? "

" At a funeral," Leon said.

" You saw them bury Ghiblikian? " my grandfather asked doubtfully.

" No. I saw them bury somebody else."

" Who? "

" I don't know."

" I may hit him," my grandfather said to my father.

" It's very simple," Uncle Leon said. " I mean, it's not simple, but the way it worked out there wasn't anything else I could do." He looked appealingly at my father. " You know how the cars got jammed up on Beacon Street a few blocks away from the chapel? "

My father nodded, looking carefully at my grandfather.

" Well, I must have got in the wrong lane," Uncle Leon said. " The traffic started to move, and a cop waved me on through a

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light, and I saw I was right behind one of the undertaker's limousines, and right in front of the limousine was a hearse from the same undertakers, so naturally I thought I'd moved up in the line and was following Mr. Ghiblikian's hearse."

He shrugged.

"Nobody told me where the cemetery was, anyway, so I had no way of knowing I was following a different hearse to a different cemetery."

"Seems only yesterday," my grandfather said to him, "you came home from the school saying, 'Papa, I got an A in American geography.' What brains have you got? How come you ever got an A in anything?"

"There was just nothing I could do," Uncle Leon said. "The traffic was heavy, and I didn't recognize the people in the car behind me, but Mr. Ghiblikian knew a lot of people I didn't know, so that didn't mean anything; and you couldn't tell who was riding in the limousine in front. So—" he took a deep breath —"it wasn't till we turned in the cemetery gate and stopped at the graveside that I realized."

My father said, "Realized that you were at the wrong funeral?"

"Realized that I was the only car in that procession, besides the hearse and the limousine. I got out of the car and there was nobody behind me. And all there was in the limousine up ahead was the widow and the minister and a man from the undertaker's."

My grandfather stared at him.

"So?"

"So what could I do?" Leon said plaintively. "I can't say I'm sorry, good-bye. I was in the presence of the dead. The minister came up and shook my hand. I had to stay where I was."

Nobody said anything for a time. Then Uncle Leon broke the silence. "The minister said his few words, and then it was over, and do you know what happened? The widow came up and kissed me on the cheek. And you do know what she said? She said, 'I know you don't want to tell me who you are, but you did my husband a favour, coming here today. I want to thank you,' she said."

And that was Uncle Leon's story, and that way it stood until the following morning, when the papers came and there was a little item that said:

Small-time racketeer Lefty Brown, fatally wounded in a hold-up attempt last Thursday, was buried at Fair View Cemetery yesterday, all but unmourned. Cemetery officials said only the

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widow, Mrs. Frances Brown, and an unidentified escort accompanied the body to its final resting-place . . .

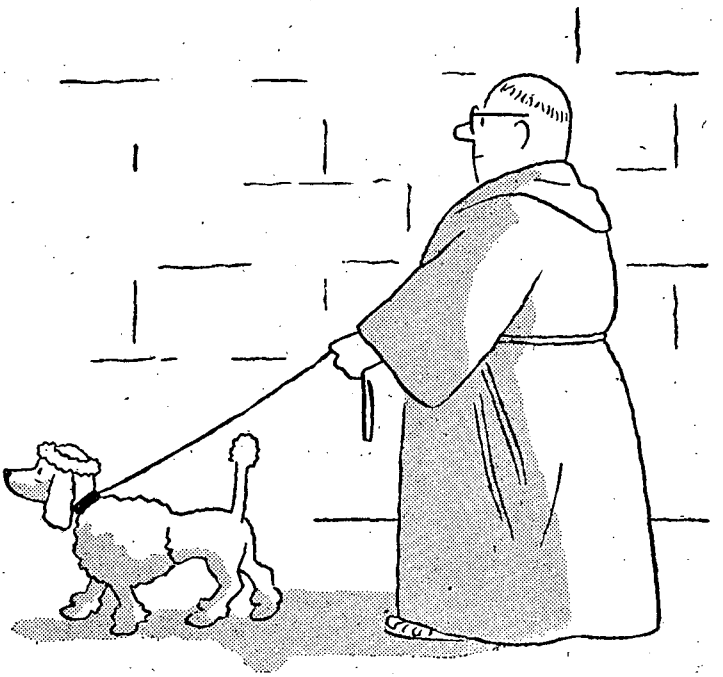
It all fitted.

That unidentified escort was my Uncle Leon, and I guess the widow must have thought he was some hoodlum or other, which is why she told him she wouldn't ask his name. And ever since that time we've had this expression in our family—"Do a favour for Lefty."

It is by no means a sardonic or sarcastic saying, but implies instead something unplanned but nonetheless warm: something that means some unexpected happiness in some unexpected direction, something that deals with fate.

It is like the expressions you have come to have in your own family—there's no describing them or explaining them to outsiders.

You know how it is.



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★ *Michael Tetley, who is twenty-six years old, was born in Kenya, studied civil engineering at Witwatersrand University, and returned to work in Kenya after taking his degree. He served in the Mau Mau campaign with the King's African Rifles, until blinded in action in a running fight. He was awarded the M.B.E.; is now training to be a physiotherapist at St. Dunstan's.*

LEOPARD PLATOON

BY MICHAEL TETLEY

LIEUTENANT NICK BALLARD of the Kenya Regiment sat on the open-air verandah of a hotel at Malindi, a small seaside resort some eighty miles north of Mombasa. The sun blazed down from a blue sky. On the horizon a few white cumulus clouds were sailing westward with the monsoon breeze wafting gently off the sea.

Lazily Nick watched the rollers from the Indian Ocean come through the break in the outer reef to crash on the sandy beach that stretched for five miles away to the north and for a mile to the south where the white sand faded into sharp, coloured coral formations. Beyond these, the living reef continued out to sea, and the waves, thundering on the rocks, could be heard faintly in the distance.

Nick sat in his bathing-trunks, drinking a glass of fresh orange juice and watching his wife Marcelle as she walked across the lawn towards him. As she joined him on the verandah, he sighed and said, " That was our last swim until we next come on leave! "

They both wondered when that would be. This had been their second leave together since their marriage when Nick had returned from his period of National Service with the Kenya Regiment. Then, on his recall owing to the Emergency, he had been seconded to a battalion of the King's African Rifles, with which he had been operating against the Mau Mau terrorists ever since.

Another young couple came to join them, and before long the conversation turned inevitably to the Emergency and what was happening up-country where Nick had been operating. With only a little encouragement from Marcelle, Nick was soon telling

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the story known to him and his friends as the " Corporal Lerriton Incident."

Corporal Lerriton was a member of the nomadic Samburu tribe that inhabits the bushveld of Northern Kenya. A small, wiry man, he had a way of moving in the forest with the minimum of noise. It was this ability to move quietly, which he had taught to the rest of the platoon, that had earned it the Swahili nickname of Platoon ya Chui—The Leopard Platoon.

With the exception of Nick, who was a European, the platoon was composed entirely of Africans, some of whom were pagans, some Mohammedans, and the remainder Christians, from seven different tribes. Apart from his own tribal language each man spoke Swahili, and in spite of their religious and tribal differences, there was a team spirit among these men that could come only from mutual trust and hard work.

Corporal Lerriton, small, and black as the ace of spades, was a key man in the platoon. He had been one of the first of his tribe to start wearing European clothes in place of the customary skins, and he had taught himself to read and write. But, despite this initiative and drive, he had not lost the African's high spirits and sense of fun, and Nick recalled one occasion, some months before, when he had entered Lerriton's tent, to find a group of men rolling with laughter.

" Jambo, Bwana Nick," Lerriton greeted him, " come and listen to this! The Sergeant is thinking of getting married and we are discussing the bride price."

Nick had drawn himself up to his full height and asked in brisk, business-like tones how much the Sergeant was willing to pay for his wife, and the Sergeant had replied, with equal seriousness, " In my tribe, the usual price is twenty head of cattle, fifteen sheep, and about ten pounds in cash."

" Oh-ho," Lerriton shouted with glee, " you're a mug to pay that price—that's far too much for a woman! Now, I bought a cheap secondhand wife for one pound. Bargain price! " And as the men roared with laughter, the Corporal turned to Nick and said, " Tell us, Bwana, how much does a European wife cost? "

But, for all his gaiety and jokes, Corporal Lerriton had a wonderful capacity for leadership and Nick had good reason for placing great trust in him. Once, for instance, the Corporal had taken a party of three privates down to wash in the icy mountain stream that ran through a huge forest, with tall dense foliage rising up on either side.

Lerriton was the first to finish his wash and was running round

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the clearing with a towel round his middle, drying himself in the sun, when his wandering gaze picked out a flattened area of grass on the edge of the clearing. Looking closer, he saw the blades slowly springing up to return to their normal position. "You men at the river, grab your guns and towels, and double over here. We've been watched . . . *Double*, I said."

Naked, except for their towels worn as loin-cloths, and with their guns at the ready, they joined the Corporal at the edge of the forest, and stared down at tracks that had been left by a man. Lerriton decided to follow them up, and they set out at once.

Four hours later they had covered several miles, been scratched and stung by giant stinging-nettles, and had taken shelter in a tree until an angry rhino had moved off the game path along which the imprints ran.

In the forest, visibility is reduced at times to six feet, and the patrol found themselves in a small Mau Mau hide-out before they realized it. The terrorists were taken by surprise and one was killed and one captured. From the prisoner they learnt that that group of terrorists was only a small scout party sent to report on troop movements.

Some time later, while Nick was watching the pitching of the tents, Corporal Lerriton came up to him and said, "The C.O. wants to see you in the Intelligence Room immediately, sir. You had better move quickly."

Nick found the Colonel with a man whom he knew to be a Kenya settler of long standing.

"Look here, Ballard," the Colonel said, "Mr. Campbell has just come in with some red-hot information and I've chosen you to tackle the operation. Having introduced you two, I'll leave you to work out the final details."

The information that Campbell gave Nick had been passed on to him by his head servant. A gang of terrorists was expected to visit a certain hut near a market garden that night to collect food. The servant would not indicate which was the exact hut for, if the operation was successful and it was discovered that he had supplied information, he knew the Mau Mau would certainly murder him.

There was no knowing which route the gang would use, so a reconnaissance of the whole area would have to be made. Anyone seen wandering round the market garden in uniform would, of course, arouse suspicion, so Nick hit upon the idea of pretending to be a surveyor—his civilian job before the Emergency.

Nick returned to camp, and then, with his platoon sergeant and Corporal Lerriton, all in mufti, he went to the Public Works Department where he borrowed surveying-equipment. After he

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had taught the others how to hold a levelling-rod, they started out with Campbell for his market garden, three miles from the centre of the town.

Campbell played his part very well. He introduced Nick to the head gardener, who was suspected of being the man who would provide the gang with food, and the three of them walked round the three-acre plot, discussing where a new water channel might be constructed—and noting the lie of the land. A quick survey revealed that there were several paths leading to the garden with thick bush all round them. After a pretence at taking levels, the party left, saying they would return the next day.

Back in his tent, Nick held a discussion with his Sergeant and Corporal Lerriton, inviting their suggestions, for he had always found that it takes an African to think like an African. It was decided to lay ambushes on three of the main paths, as the alarm signal might be raised if the men were seen lying in the open near the huts. Orders were issued for the platoon to be ready by 1830 hours.

In the meantime Nick went carefully over the instructions he would give the men. He decided to split up his party into three groups of four men. He would take one group, the Sergeant the second, and Corporal Lerriton the third. He would tell them to lie in ambush position from 1945 hours until the agreed time for each party to return and regroup under a certain "Big Tree." Nick would leave his ambush position at 2255, the Sergeant at 2300 and the Corporal at 2305. In this way he hoped to avoid any possibility of the parties clashing and shooting each other up.

It was time to prepare for the night's work. A quick look at the sky told Nick that it would be a clear, cold night at this altitude of seven thousand feet. Under his camouflaged parachute smock, he pulled on two sweaters and then drew on his calf-length, jungle-green patrol boots. His trousers were khaki, and once he had blackened his face with burnt cork, he would need only a few green twigs stuck in his cloth hat to enable him to merge easily into the bushes.

He strapped on his webbing belt, with a sling for his magazines and a pouch full of hand grenades. As he checked to see that his submachine-gun, the new Patchett, was in first-class order, he noticed the Sergeant falling in the platoon.

In the dim light he saw the bolts of the guns being manipulated as a round was placed in the chamber, and there followed the faint clicking of steel against steel as the bolts went home. After checking that all the safety catches were on, Nick briefed the platoon and it moved off silently across the road and into the shadows.

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There must be no word spoken for the next four hours. The men were wide awake and keyed up. This operation had been based on information received, so it should prove exciting and give results. They all hoped it would make up for the last fifty-six ambushes that had been laid without any information and of which all but one had been unsuccessful.

The men were moving silently, in single file. Suddenly the patrol stopped and merged into the bushes at the side of the path along which they had been walking. They waited for three minutes and then started to move on. It was a routine " listen," to get the general sound of the area.

The patrol continued on its way towards the thick scrub valley that divided the town in two. For some time a curfew had been enforced after sundown and anyone found outside after that time was likely to be killed on sight. It was for this reason that night work required close liaison between the Security Forces.

Moving cautiously, the patrol glided noiselessly from shadow to shadow until the Big Tree was reached where, without a single word, the sections split up and moved to their respective ambush positions.

Nick selected a point from which any movement would be visible, and anyone moving would be silhouetted against the star-studded sky. Hidden in the bushes, six feet from the edge of the path, the men lay down to wait patiently for the next four hours.

The evening wore on, silent, motionless. Once Nick thought he saw a movement and held his breath, automatically tightening his grasp on the pistol grip of his Patchett. The movement turned out to be nothing but a bush moving in the wind. The distant lights of a car swung across the valley. Each man wished he could change places with the man behind the wheel. Still nothing happened. All that broke the monotony was an aching in the joints, followed by careful attempts to stretch.

At 2255 Nick ordered the ambush back and, silently cursing the Mau Mau for their non-appearance, put it down to the failure of another of the Colonel's hunches.

Meanwhile Corporal Lerriton, still in his ambush position, looked at his watch. Two minutes to go before he ordered the section back. He could imagine Nick waiting under the Big Tree and the Sergeant just starting to move towards it. With a sigh he stood up; his three companions followed suit and, holding their guns at the ready, they started to move towards the Big Tree to rejoin the others.

Suddenly Lerriton caught sight of a party of men advancing towards him, led by a tall man. He raised his rifle. But, as he was about to squeeze the trigger, the thought struck him that this

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might be Nick and his group who had lost their way in the dark. Withholding his fire, he sank to one knee.

When the men were only four paces away, Lerriton saw that the leader was wearing a different type of hat from Nick's. Still uncertain, he challenged the man.

With a yell, the leading Mau Mau dived and hurled him to the ground. His gun knocked from his hands, Lerriton grappled with the man, fighting for his life.

A roar of machine-gun fire shattered the air as the Brens from the rest of the section opened up. The night seemed to come alive. Dogs started barking, shrieks and cries rent the darkness, air and tracer bullets went soaring like comets into the sky. Four terrorists closed with the four soldiers and fought hand to hand. The rest stood at a point thirty yards away and, not minding whether they hit their own men or the native troops, poured bullet after bullet into the fight.

Lerriton was pinned down and the Mau Mau was drawing his revolver, when suddenly there was an explosion and a brilliant point of light burst above the fight. Lerriton knew that Nick had fired an illuminating flare from the two-inch mortar. Startled by this diversion, the terrorist relaxed his hold for a second. Swiftly, Lerriton drew his bayonet and buried it in his aggressor's chest.

As the man rolled over, Lerriton grabbed his gun and, closing with each group of wrestling men in turn, blew the terrorists' brains out. The Mau Mau who had been shooting into the fight had made off as soon as they heard the war-cry of *Rooarah* given by Nick and the others.

Shaken but unharmed, the section picked up the terrorists' guns and ran to report on the situation. As Lerriton approached the Big Tree another illuminating flare burst overhead.

Seeing Nick, he shouted, " They've gone down the path to the river."

At once Nick ordered high-explosive bombs to be fired by the mortar, and six seconds later there followed a series of dull explosions near the river bank. The firing stopped as suddenly as it had started and silence fell again. It was decided not to follow up that night but return to camp, collect the tracker dog, and continue the chase next morning.

In the grey, misty light of dawn the platoon slowly advanced to the scene of last night's fight. In the immediate vicinity there were seven dead bodies, one of whom was later identified as the head gardener. The tracker dog followed the scent to the river's edge where it was lost. With no further clues to follow up, the platoon regrouped and, though tired and dirty, they returned to camp triumphantly singing their war-song.

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The night's work became known in the Regiment as the "Corporal Lerriton Incident."

Nick had been so engrossed in his story that he had not noticed a dhow coming in, gliding over the gentle swell with her sails filled, while from her decks came the beating of drums and voices singing as the Arabs celebrated the end of a long voyage. As the dhow dropped anchor, the singing and drumming ceased.

In the same way, Nick thought, one day soon the roar of guns would be heard no more in Kenya. He, Marcelle, and Corporal Lerriton were all striving for peace to return to this beautiful land . . . And the day would come.

★ ★ ★

WHOA, NOAH!

Room for one more? A recent Turkish émigré was heard to declare somewhat sourly that if Noah had been British, the Ark would not have got up Constitution Hill, let alone Mount Ararat. Well, the Turkish can have their delight: we'll stick to our gundogs. Answer all these pet posers correctly and you've probably cheated. Less than ten points and you qualify as a dumb friend who needs to look for help to page 143.

1. *What humans do you associate with :*
   a. Hodge *b. Bran*
   c. Mr. Falla *d. Flush*
   e. Argos *f. Wessex*

2. *What animals do the following breed names denote:*
   a. Weimaraner *b. Lippizaner* *c. Aberdeen*
   d. Aberdeen-Angus *e. Abyssinian*

3. *What's so odd about a. a Basenji b. a Manx cat*

4. *Who wrote the following animal epics: Black Beauty; Ferdinand; Ode on a Favourite Cat, drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes*

5. *A bone-us of* 10 *points each if you can answer these grave questions:*
   a. What noble 18*th-century letter-writer left legacies to his cats?—he offended the owner of* 1*a, by the way.*
   b. A famous French wit and lady of the salons, Madame Du Deffand, left her ill-tempered little dog to an English man of letters with a taste for the Gothic. Who was he?

6. *Not recommended for domestic bliss, these mongrels were monsters. Name their mixture: a. Sphinx b. Minotaur*

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And standing watch upon the peak,
He dreams of lips and hands,
Drugged liquor and a painted cheek,
And sighs, nor understands

That he's a dreamer—and the call
That made a fool of him
In Hamburg, or in Montreal,
Still to the wide sea's rim

Must lure him on with hint of wine
More fragrant, and of lips
Unpainted, luscious, half divine
To men who sail in ships.

GOODRIDGE MACDONALD, *The Sailor*

Waterfront

The afternoon I learned he knew the boy, we rode the subway twice from Forty-second Street to Coney Island without leaving our seats because Wallace not only had to hear what I could tell, but had his own story to relate.

"I used to see him over at the wharves on the Hudson," he had begun as the train chattered out of the tunnel onto rickety Brooklyn elevated lines which pass beside the housetops, over busy streets, and through the winter-dead carnival of Coney Island. "I'll never understand what it is about ships that gets me; I've been on them so often now you'd think they'd lost their novelty. But they haven't. It's not only being aboard them that excites me, it's even being near them or seeing them: especially in harbour on a white-hot summer day when the water is spraying up at you and a little way off a tramp or a liner is

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loading. I think the greatest thing man's ever done is the taking of the sea: it gave us the world. Just look at it, Harry."

Beyond the blue-red plaster world of Luna Park, the boarded custard stands, the canvas-covered carousels, there was the flat grey stretch of ocean.

"Here we are, land animals, and without natural equipment or mutation we've learned to live on and under the water."

ALFRED CHESTER, *Jamie is My Heart's Desire*

Dream Boats

Through the faintest filigree
Over the dim waters go
Little ships of Arcady
When the morning moon is low.

FRANCIS LEDWIDGE, *The Ships of Arcady*

River Cruise

The weather was fine, and from morning to night I was up on deck with my grandmother, floating there beneath the bright sky, between the banks of the Volga embroidered with the golden silk of autumn. The rust-coloured boat with a barge in tow moved lazily against the current, nosing its way with a gentle slapping of paddles through the grey-blue water. The barge was grey and resembled a water bug. The sun stole imperceptibly above the Volga; every hour brought something new—everything about us changed. The green hills were folds in the rich raiment of the earth. Towns and villages seemed made of gingerbread as they passed in the distance; golden autumn leaves floated on the water.

M. GORKY, *Childhood*

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Dog Watch

Most impressive were the imperial caïques. John Sanderson, at the end of the sixteenth century, describes them as "most ritch and bewetifull to behould, the poupe all ivory, ebonie, or of seahorsse teeth, mother of pearle and goulde, sett with all manner of pretiouse stones." When the grand Turk goes on the water, "to rowe him he hath eighty chosen men, two and two at an ower, twenty owers one aside, all in white shirts and redd capps, who often in thier rowinge barke like doggs. The reason I know not, except it be when they heare him talke (to the Bustangiebassi, who sits at the rudder) that they dare not harken to his talk." Purchas repeats the story of the oarsmen barking: "I have often heard them upon the water. Now and then between times many of them say *Bough*, boughwahe, bough, boughwahe, etc., and then pull some few strokes and tut againe."

ROBERT LIDDELL, *Byzantium and Istanbul*

Night Voyage

Barque of phosphor
On the palmy beach,

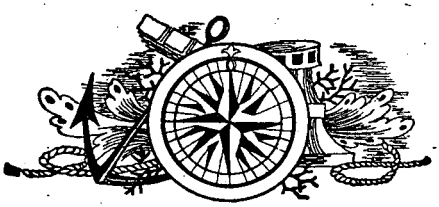
Move outward into heaven,
Into the alabasters
And night blues.

Foam and cloud are one.
Sultry moon-monsters
Are dissolving.

Fill your black hull
With white moonlight.

There will never be an end
To this droning of the surf.

WALLACE STEVENS, *Fabliau of Florida*



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SPY STORY

Where on Earth would they find another Suspect like me?

BY ROBERT SHECKLEY

I'M really in trouble now, more trouble than I ever thought possible. It's a little difficult to explain how I got into this mess, so maybe I'd better begin at the beginning.

Ever since I graduated from trade school in 1991 I'd had a good job as sphinx-valve assembler on the Starling Spaceship production line. I really loved those big ships, roaring to Cygnus and Alpha Centaurus and all the other places in the news. I was a young man with a future, I had friends, I even knew some girls. But it was no good. The job was fine, but I couldn't do my best work with those hidden cameras focused on my hands. Not that I minded the cameras themselves; it was the whirring noise they made. I couldn't concentrate.

I complained to Internal Security. I said to them, look, why can't I have new, quiet cameras, like everybody else? But they were too busy to do anything about it.

Then lots of little things started to bother me. Like the tape recorder in my TV set. The F.B.I. never adjusted it right, and it hummed all night long. I complained a hundred times. I said to them, look, nobody else's recorder hums that way. Why mine? But they always gave me that speech about winning the cold war, and how they couldn't please everybody. Things like that make a person feel inferior. I suspected that my government wasn't interested in me.

Take my Spy, for example. I was an 18-D Suspect—the same classification as the Vice-President—and this entitled me to part-time surveillance. But my particular Spy must have thought he was a film actor, because he always wore a stained trench coat, and a slouch hat jammed over his eyes. He was a thin, nervous type, and he followed practically on my heels for fear of losing me. Well, he was doing his best. Spying is a competitive business, and I couldn't help feeling sorry, he was so bad at it. But it was embarrassing, just to be associated with him. My friends laughed themselves sick whenever I showed up with him breathing down the back of my neck.

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" Bill," they said, " is *that* the best you can do? "

And my girl-friend thought he was creepy. Naturally I went to the Senate Investigations Committee, and said, look, why can't you give me a *trained* Spy, like the ones my friends have?

They said they'd see, but I knew I wasn't important enough to work it.

All these little things put me on edge, and any psychologist will tell you it doesn't take something big to drive you crazy. I was sick of being ignored, sick of being neglected.

That's when I started to think about Deep Space. There were billions of square miles of nothingness out there, dotted with too many stars to count. There were enough Earth-type planets for every man, woman, and child. There had to be a spot for me. I bought a *Universe Light List*, and a tattered *Galactic Pilot*. I read through the *Gravity Tide Book*, and the *Interstellar Pilot Charts*. Finally I reckoned I knew as much as I'd ever know.

All my savings went into an old Star Clipper. This antique leaked oxygen along its seams. It had a touchy atomic pile, and spacewarp drives that might throw you practically anywhere. It was dangerous, but the only life I was risking was my own. At least, that's what I thought. So I got my passport, blue clearance, red clearance, numbers certificate, space-sickness shots, and deratification papers. At the job I collected my last day's pay and waved to the cameras. At my flat, I packed my clothes and said good-bye to the recorders. On the street, I shook hands with my poor Spy and wished him luck.

I had burnt my bridges behind me.

All that was left was final clearance, so I hurried down to the Final Clearance Office. A clerk with white hands and a sun-lamp tan looked at me dubiously. " Where did you wish to go? " he asked me.

" Space," I said.

" Of course. But where in space? "

" I don't know yet," I said. " Just space. Deep Space. Free Space."

The clerk sighed wearily, " You'll have to be more explicit than that, if you want a clearance. Are you going to settle on a planet in American Space? Or did you wish to emigrate to British Space? Or Dutch Space? Or French Space? "

" I didn't know *space* could be owned," I said.

" Then you don't keep up with the times," he told me, with a superior smirk. " The United States has claimed all space between co-ordinates 2XA and D2B, except for a small and relatively unimportant segment which is claimed by Mexico.

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The Soviet Union has co-ordinates 3DB to LO2—a very bleak region, I can assure you. And then there is the Belgian Grant, the Chinese Grant, the Sinhalese Grant, the Nigerian Grant— "

I stopped him. "Where is Free Space?" I asked.

"There is none."

"None at all? How far do the boundary lines extend?"

"To infinity," he told me proudly.

For a moment it pulled me up short. Somehow I had never considered the possibility of every bit of infinite space being owned. But it was natural enough. After all, *somebody* had to own it.

"I want to go into American Space," I said. It didn't seem to matter at the time, although it turned out otherwise.

The clerk nodded sullenly. He checked my records back to the age of five—there was no sense in going back any farther—and gave me the Final Clearance.

The spaceport had my ship all serviced, and I managed to get away without blowing a tube. It wasn't until Earth dwindled to a pinpoint and disappeared behind me that I realized I was alone.

Fifty hours out I was making a routine inspection of my stores, when I observed that one of my vegetable sacks had a shape unlike the other sacks. Upon opening it I found a girl, where a hundred pounds of potatoes should have been.

A stowaway. I stared at her, open-mouthed.

"Well," she said, "are you going to help me out? Or would you prefer to close the sack and forget the whole thing?"

I helped her out. She said, "Your potatoes are lumpy."

I could have said the same of her, with considerable approval. She was a slender girl, for the most part, with hair the reddish blonde colour of a flaring jet, a pert, dirt-smudged face, and brooding blue eyes. On Earth, I would gladly have walked ten miles to meet her. In space, I wasn't so sure.

"Could you give me something to eat?" she asked. "All I've had since we left is raw carrots."

I made her a sandwich. While she ate, I asked, "What are you doing here?"

"You wouldn't understand," she said, between mouthfuls.

"Yes, I would."

She walked to a porthole and looked out at the spectacle of stars—American stars, most of them—burning in the void of American space.

"I wanted to be free," she said.

"What?"

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She sank wearily on my bunk. "I suppose you'd call me a romantic," she said quietly. "I'm the sort of fool who recites poetry to herself in the black night, and cries in front of some absurd little statuette. Yellow autumn leaves make me tremble, and dew on a green lawn seems like the tears of all Earth. My psychiatrist tells me I'm a misfit."

She closed her eyes with a weariness I could appreciate. Standing in a potato sack for fifty hours can be pretty exhausting.

"Earth was getting me down," she said. "I couldn't stand it—the regimentation, the discipline, the privation, the cold war, the hot war, everything. I wanted to laugh in free air, run through green fields, walk unmolested through gloomy forests, sing—"

"But why did you pick on me?"

"You were bound for freedom," she said. "I'll leave, if you insist."

That was a pretty silly idea, out in the depths of space. And I couldn't afford the fuel to turn back.

"You can stay," I said.

"Thank you," she said, very softly. "You *do* understand."

"Sure, sure," I said. "But we'll have to get a few things straight. First of all—" But she had fallen asleep on my bunk, with a trusting smile on her lips.

Immediately I searched her handbag. I found five lipsticks, a compact, a phial of Venus V perfume, a paper-bound book of poetry, and a badge that read: *Special Investigator, F.B.I.*

I had suspected it, of course. Girls don't talk that way, but Spies always do.

It was nice to know my government was still looking out for me. It made space seem less lonely.

The ship moved into the depths of American Space. By working fifteen hours out of twenty-four, I managed to keep my spacewarp drive in one piece, my atomic piles reasonably cool, and my hull seams tight. Mavis O'Day—as my Spy was named—cooked all meals, took care of the light housekeeping, and hid a number of small cameras around the ship. They buzzed abominably, but I pretended not to notice.

In the circumstances, however, my relations with Miss O'Day were quite proper.

The trip was proceeding normally—even happily—until something happened.

I was dozing at the controls. Suddenly an intense light flared on my starboard bow. I leapt backward, knocking over Mavis as she was inserting a spool of film into her No. 3 camera.

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"Excuse me," I said.

"Oh, don't mind me," she said.

I helped her to her feet. Her supple nearness was dangerously pleasant, and the tantalizing scent of Venus V tickled my nostrils.

"You can let me go now," she said.

"I know," I said, and continued to hold her. My mind inflamed by her nearness, I heard myself saying, "Mavis—I haven't known you very long, but— "

"Yes, Bill?" she asked.

In the madness of the moment I had forgotten our relationship of Suspect and Spy. I don't know what I might have said. But just then a second light blazed outside the ship.

I released Mavis and hurried to the controls. With difficulty I throttled down the old Star Clipper to an idle, and looked around.

Outside, in the vast vacuum of space, was a single fragment of rock. Perched upon it was a child in a spacesuit, holding a box of flares in one hand and a tiny spacesuited dog in the other.

Quickly we got him inside and unbuttoned his spacesuit.

"My dog— " he said.

"He's all right, son," I told him.

"Terribly sorry to break in on you this way," the lad said.

"Forget it," I said. "What were you doing out there?"

"Sir," he began, in treble tones, "I shall have to start at the start. My father was a spaceship test-pilot, and he died valiantly, trying to break the light barrier. Mother recently remarried. Her present husband is a large, black-haired man with narrow, shifty eyes and tightly compressed lips. Until recently he was employed at the ribbon counter in a large department store. He resented my presence from the beginning. I suppose I reminded him of my dead father, with my blond curls, large oval eyes, and merry ways. Our relationship smouldered fitfully. Then an uncle of his died—in suspicious circumstances—and he inherited holdings in British Space.

"Accordingly, we set out in our spaceship. As soon as we reached this deserted area, he said to Mother, 'Rachel, he's old enough to fend for himself.' My mother said, 'Dirk, he's so young!'

"But soft-hearted, laughing Mother was no match for the inflexible will of the man I would never call father. He thrust me into my spacesuit, handed me a box of flares, put Flicker into his own little suit, and said, 'A lad can do all right for himself in space these days.' 'Sir,' I said, 'there is no planet within two hundred light years.' 'You'll make out,' he grinned, and thrust me upon this spur of rock."

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The boy paused for breath, and his dog Flicker looked up at me with moist oval eyes. I gave the dog a bowl of bread-and-milk, and watched the lad eat a peanut-butter sandwich. Mavis carried the little chap into the bunk room and tenderly tucked him into bed.

I returned to the controls, started the ship again, and turned on the intercom.

"Wake up, you little idiot!" I heard Mavis say.

"Lemme sleep," the boy answered.

"Wake up! What did Congressional Investigation *mean* by sending you here? Don't they realize this is an F.B.I. case?"

"He's been reclassified as a 10-F Suspect," the boy said. "That calls for full surveillance."

"Yes, but *I'm* here," Mavis cried.

"You didn't do so well on your last case," the boy said. "I'm sorry, miss, but Security comes first."

"So they send you," Mavis said, sobbing now. "A twelve-year-old child—"

"I'll be thirteen in seven months."

"A twelve-year-old child! And I've tried so hard! I've studied, read books, taken evening courses, listened to lectures—"

"It's a tough break," the boy said sympathetically. "Personally, I want to be a spaceship test-pilot. At my age, this is the only way I can get in flying-hours. Do you think he'll let me fly the ship?"

I snapped off the intercom. I should have felt wonderful. Two full-time Spies were watching me. It meant I was really someone, someone to be watched.

But the truth was, my Spies were only a girl and a twelve-year-old boy. They must have been scraping the barrel when they sent those two.

My government was still ignoring me, in its own fashion.

We managed well on the rest of the flight. Young Roy, as the lad was called, took over the piloting of the ship, and his dog sat alertly in the co-pilot's seat. Mavis continued to cook and keep house. I spent my time patching seams. We were as happy a group of Spies and Suspect as you could find.

We found an uninhabited Earth-type planet. Mavis liked it because it was small and rather sweet, with the green fields and gloomy forests she had read about in her poetry books. Young Roy liked the clear lakes, and the mountains, which were just the right height for a boy to climb.

We landed, and began to settle.

Young Roy found an immediate interest in the animals I

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animated from the Freezer. He appointed himself guardian of cows and horses, protector of ducks and geese, defender of pigs and chickens. This kept him so busy that his reports to the Senate became fewer and fewer, and finally stopped altogether.

You really couldn't expect any more from a Spy of his age.

And after I had set up the cloches and force-seeded a few acres, Mavis and I took long walks in the gloomy forest, and in the bright green and yellow fields that bordered it. One day we packed a picnic lunch and ate on the edge of a little waterfall. Mavis's unbound hair spread lightly over her shoulders, and there was a distant, enchanted look in her blue eyes. All in all, she seemed extremely un-Spylike, and I had to remind myself over and over of our respective roles.

"Bill," she said after a while.

"Yes?" I said.

"Nothing." She tugged at a blade of grass.

I couldn't work that one out. But her hand strayed somewhere near mine. Our fingertips touched, and clung.

We were silent for a long time. Never had I been so happy.

"Bill?"

"Yes?"

"Bill dear, could you ever— "

What she was going to say, and what I might have answered, I shall never know. At that moment our silence was shattered by the roar of jets.

Down from the sky dropped a spaceship.

Ed Wallace, the pilot, was a white-haired old man in a slouch hat and a stained trench coat. He was a salesman for Clear-Flo, an outfit that cleansed water on a planetary basis. Since I had no need for his services, he thanked me, and left.

But he didn't get very far. His engines turned over once, and stopped with a frightening finality.

I looked over his drive mechanism, and found that a sphinx valve had blown. It would take me a month to make him a new one with hand tools.

"This is terribly awkward," he murmured. "I suppose I'll have to stay here."

"I suppose so," I said.

He looked at his ship regretfully. "Can't understand how it happened," he said.

"Maybe you weakened the valve when you cut it with a hacksaw," I said, and walked off. I had seen the telltale marks.

Mr. Wallace pretended not to hear me. That evening I overheard his report on the interstellar radio, which functioned

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perfectly. His home office, interestingly enough, was not Clear-Flo, but Central Intelligence.

Mr. Wallace made a good vegetable grower, even though he spent most of his time sneaking around with camera and notebook. His presence spurred young Roy to greater efforts. Mavis and I stopped walking in the gloomy forest, and there didn't seem time to return to the yellow and green fields, to finish some unfinished sentences.

But our little settlement prospered. We had other visitors. A man and his wife from Regional Intelligence dropped by, posing as itinerant fruit-pickers. They were followed by two girl photographers, secret representatives of the Executive Information Bureau, and then there was a young newspaperman, who was actually from the Idaho Council of Spatial Morals.

Every single one of them blew a sphinx valve when it was time to leave.

I didn't know whether to feel proud or ashamed. Half a dozen agents were watching *me*—but every one of them was a second-rater. And invariably, after a few weeks on my planet, they became involved in farmwork and their Spying efforts dwindled to nothing.

I had bitter moments. I pictured myself as a testing-ground for novices, something to cut their teeth on. I was the Suspect they gave to Spies who were too old or too young, inefficient, scatter-brained, or just plain incompetent. I saw myself as a sort of half-pay-retirement-plan Suspect, a substitute for a pension.

But it didn't bother me too much. I did have a position, although it was a little difficult to define. I was happier than I had ever been on Earth, and my Spies were pleasant and co-operative people.

Our little colony was happy and secure.

I thought it could go on for ever.

Then, one fateful night, there was unusual activity. Some important message seemed to be coming in, and all radios were on. I had to ask a few Spies to share sets, to keep from burning out my generators.

Finally all radios were turned off, and the Spies held conferences. I heard them whispering into the small hours. The next morning, they were all assembled in the living-room, and their faces were long and sombre. Mavis stepped forward as spokeswoman.

"Something terrible has happened," she said to me. "But first, we have something to reveal to you. Bill, we are none of

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us what we seemed. We are all Spies for the government."

"Really?" I said, not wanting to hurt any feelings.

"It's true," she said. "We've been Spying on you, Bill."

"Really?" I said again. "Even you?"

"Even me," Mavis said unhappily.

"And now it's all over," young Roy blurted out.

That shook me. "*Why?*" I asked.

They looked at each other. Finally Mr. Wallace, bending the rim of his hat back and forth in his calloused hands, said, "Bill, a re-survey has just shown that this sector of space is not owned by the United States."

"What country does own it?" I asked.

"Be calm," Mavis said. "Try to understand. This entire sector was overlooked in the international survey, and now it can't be claimed by any country. As the first to settle here, this and several million miles of space surrounding it belong to you, Bill."

I was too stunned to speak.

"In the circumstances," Mavis continued, "we have no authorization to be here. So we're leaving immediately."

"But you can't!" I cried. "I haven't repaired your sphinx valves!"

"All Spies carry spare sphinx valves and hacksaw blades," she said gently.

Watching them troop out to their ships, I pictured the solitude ahead of me. I would have no government to watch over me. No longer would I hear footsteps in the night, turn, and see the dedicated face of a Spy behind me. No longer would the whir of an old camera soothe me at work, nor the buzz of a defective recorder lull me to sleep.

And yet, I felt even sorrier for them. Those poor, earnest, clumsy, bungling Spies were returning to a fast, efficient, competitive world. Where would they find another Suspect like me, or another place like my planet?

"Good-bye, Bill," Mavis said, offering me her hand.

I watched her walk to Mr. Wallace's ship. It was only then that I realized that she was no longer *my* Spy.

"Mavis!" I cried, running after her. She hurried towards the ship. I caught her by the arm. "Wait. There was something I started to say in the ship. I wanted to say it again on the picnic."

She tried to pull away from me. In most unromantic tones I croaked, "Mavis, I love you."

She was in my arms. We kissed, and I told her that her home was here, on this planet with its gloomy forests and yellow and

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green fields. Here with me. She was far too happy to speak.

With Mavis staying, young Roy reconsidered. Mr. Wallace's vegetables were just ripening, and he wanted to look after them. And everyone else had some chore or other that he couldn't drop. So here I am—ruler, king, dictator, president, whatever I want to call myself. Spies are beginning to pour in now from *every* country—not only America. To feed all my subjects, I'll soon have to import food. But the other rulers are beginning to refuse me assistance. They think I've bribed their Spies to desert.

I haven't, I swear it. They just come.

I can't resign, because I own this place. And I haven't the heart to send them away. I'm at the end of my tether.

With my entire population consisting of former government Spies, you'd think I'd have an easy time forming a government of my own. But no, they're completely unco-operative. I'm the absolute ruler of a planet of farmers, dairymen, shepherds, and stock-breeders, so I guess we won't starve after all. But that's not the point. The point is: how the devil am I supposed to rule?

Not a single one of these people will Spy for me.

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Death of a Huntsman

By H. E. BATES

EVERY weekday evening, watches ready, black umbrellas neatly rolled and put away with neat black homburgs on carriage racks, attaché cases laid aside, newspapers poised, the fellow-travellers of Harry G. Bamfield, the city gentlemen, waited for him to catch—or rather miss—the five-ten train.

As the minutes jerked away on the big station clock above—wreaths of smoke and steam the city gentlemen sat with jocular expectation on the edges of carriage seats or actually craning necks from carriage windows, as if ready to check with stop-watches the end of Harry Bamfield's race with time.

"Running it pretty fine tonight."

"Doomed, I think. Never make it. Doomed."

"Oh, trust Harry."

"Absolutely doomed, I think. Never make it."

"Oh, Harry'll make it. Trust Harry. Never fluked it yet. Trust Harry G."

All Harry Bamfield's friends, like himself, lived in the country, kept farms of some sort and came to London every day. J. B. (Punch) Warburton, who was in shipping and every other day or so brought up from his farm little perforated boxes of fresh eggs for less fortunate friends in the city, would get ready, in mockery, to hold open the carriage door.

"Action stations," he would say. J. B. Warburton, a wit, was not called Punch for nothing. "Grappling-hooks at ready!"

"This is a bit of bad," George Reed Thompson would say. "Dammit, I believe—" He too had a farm. Its chief object was to enable him to stock a large deep-freeze, every summer, with excellent asparagus, strawberries, raspberries, spring chickens, game, and vegetables, all home-raised—"Harry's going to let us down!"

"Nine-ten, nine-fifteen."

Craning from the window, Freddie Jekyll, who was a stockbroker and rode, every spring, with great success at local point-to-points, would actually begin to check off the seconds. "Nine-twenty—"

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"Officer of the watch, keep a sharp look-out there!"
"Ay, ay, sir."
"All ashore who are going ashore."
"Ay, ay, sir."
"A firm hold on those grappling-hooks!"
"Dammit, he's missed it. I make it eleven past already."

Sometimes a whistle would blow; sometimes a final door would slam with doom along the far hissing reaches of the waiting express. But always, at last, without fail, the city gentlemen would be able to raise, at first severally and then collectively, a joyful, bantering cheer.

"Here, Harry, here! Here, old boy!"

Cheering, signalling frantically from the windows, thrusting out of it the malacca handles of umbrellas as if they were really grappling-hooks, they would drag Harry Bamfield finally aboard.

"Five-ten-point-twelve," they would tell him. "New world record."

Panting, smiling modestly from behind sweat-clouded spectacles, Harry Bamfield would lean shyly on the handle of his umbrella, struggling to recover breath.

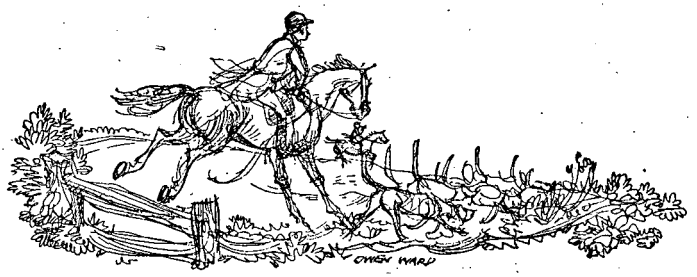
Laughing, the city gentlemen would begin to unfold their papers, offering congratulations.

"Well run, Harry. Damn near thing though, old boy. Thought you were doomed."

But that, they always told themselves, was the great thing about Harry. You could always rely on Harry. You could always be sure of Harry.

Harry would never let you down. What a good sport he was, they all said, Harry Bamfield. There were no two ways, no possible arguments about that.

There was no shadow of harm in Harry Bamfield.



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All his life Harry Bamfield, who looked ten years more middle-aged than forty-three, had been fond of horses without ever being a good rider of them.

His body was short and chunky. It had the odd appearance, especially when he rode a horse, of having had a middle cut of six or seven inches removed from between ribs and groin, leaving the trunk too short between legs and shoulders. It was also rather soft, almost pulpy, as if his bones had never matured. This pulpiness was still more noticeable in the eyes, which behind their spectacles were shy, grey, protuberant and rather jellified, looking altogether too large for his balding head.

All this gave him, in the saddle, a floppy, over-eager air and, as the black tails of his coat flew out behind, the look of a fat little bird trying hard to fly from the ground and never quite succeeding. Riding, he would tell you, was awful fun, and his voice was high and squeaky.

Every evening, ten minutes before the arrival of the train that brought him back to the country with his friends the city gentlemen, he started to give a final polish to his spectacles, the lenses of which were rather thick.

For five minutes or so he polished them with scrupulous short-sightedness on a square of cream silk that he kept in his breast pocket, huffing on them with brief panting little breaths, showing a pink, lapping tongue.

The effect of this scrupulous preparation of the spectacles was to make his face seem quite absurdly alight. Smiling from behind the glittering lenses, calling good night to his friends, he came out of the station with wonderful eagerness, head well in front of the chunky body, black umbrella prodding him forward, attaché case paddling the air from the other hand, bowler hat tilted slightly backward and sitting on the loose crimson ears.

Once out of the station he sucked in a long deep breath—as if to say: Ah, at last, the country! The short little body seemed transformed with eager exhilaration. Fields came down almost to within reach of the fences surrounding the station coal-yards and on late spring evenings the greening hedges were brilliant and thick as banks of parsley. Primroses and sprays of pale mauve lady-smocks sprang lushly from damp dykes below the hedgerows and along the roads beyond these were cherry orchards in white thick bloom.

A few weeks later apple orchards and great snow mounds of hawthorn came into blossom and in the scent of them he could taste the first milkiness of summer just as surely as he tasted winter in the first sweet-acid tang of the big-toothed Spanish chestnut leaves as they began to swim down from the trees in November, haunting the dark staves of baring copses.

Then, as he drove home in his car, much of his eagerness vanished. He gradually took on the air of being free: free of the dusty odours of city offices, city termini, free of his friends the city gentlemen in the smoky train.

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His body relapsed completely into quietness. His big eyes stopped their agitation and became, behind the bulging lenses of the spectacles, perfectly, blissfully at rest.

It took him twenty minutes to drive out to the big double-gabled house of old red brick that had, behind it, a row of excellent stables with a long hay-loft above.

He had been awfully lucky, he would tell you, to get the house. It was absolutely what he wanted. The stables themselves were perfect and at the front were four good meadows, all flat, bordered by a pleasant alder-shaded stream.

The fields were about twenty acres in all, and from three of them, in June, he gathered all the hay he would need. Then in early autumn he took down part of the fences and put up a run of four brushwood jumps and over these, on Saturdays and Sundays, he started practising jumping. Sometimes, too, in the same inelastic way that never improved during the entire hunting season, he practised jumping the brook.

Then by late November the alders lost the last of their leaves; the hazels, the willows, and the sweet chestnuts became naked too and presently he could feel the sting of frost in his nostrils as he brought the horse in through the blue-grey twilights across which the sound of croaking pheasants settling to roost clattered like wintry frightened laughter.

"That you, Harry? I hope to God you didn't forget the gin?"

"Yes, it's me, Katey."

If it had not been that he was almost always blinking very slightly, with a sort of mechanical twitch, behind the glasses, it might have seemed that he had never lost the habit of surprise as his wife called to him, her voice somewhere between a croak and a cough, from the kitchen.

It might also have seemed, from the snap in her voice, that she was not very tolerant of forgetfulness. But fortunately neither surprise nor forgetfulness were habits of his. He was never surprised and he never forgot the gin.

"On the hall table, Katey," he would tell her. "Any message from Lewis? I'm just hopping across the yard."

His inquiry about Lewis, his groom, was never answered, except by another cough, and this never surprised him either. His only real thought was for his horses.

In summer he had only to whistle and they came to him from across the meadows. In winter he walked quietly across the courtyard to the stables, let himself in, touched for a moment the warm flanks of the two animals, said good night to them exactly as if they were children and then, almost on tip-toe, let himself out again.

Outside, if there were stars, he generally stopped to look up at them, breathing over again the good country air. Then he stiffened, braced his short pulpy body, and went back into the house.

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"Where the hell did you say the gin was? Every bloody evening you slink off like a badger and I'm left wondering where you dump the stuff."

"I told you where it was, Katey." From the hall table he would quietly pick up the gin bottle and take it to the kitchen. "Here. Here it is."

"Then why the hell couldn't you say so?"

"I did say so."

"You talk like a squeak-mouse all the time. How do you expect me to hear if you talk like a damn squeak-mouse?"

His wife was tallish, fair, and very blowsy. She looked, he always thought, remarkably like some caged and battered lioness. Her hair, which she wore down on her shoulders, had passed through several stages of blondeness. Sometimes it was almost white, bleached to lifelessness; sometimes it was the yellow of a ferret, and he would not have been surprised then to see that her eyes were pink; sometimes it was like coarse rope, with a cord of darker hair twisting through the centre. But the most common effect was that of the lioness, restless, caged, and needing a comb.

"Any news, Katey?" he would say. "Anything been happening?"

"Where, what, and to whom?" she would ask him. "To bloody whom? Tell me." The fingers of both hands were stained yellow with much smoking. Her lips were rather thick. She had also mastered the art of getting a cigarette to stick to the lower, thicker one without letting it fall into whatever she was cooking.

She was very fond of cooking. The air, every evening, was full of odours of herbs, garlic, wine vinegars, and frying onions. The smell of frying onions invariably made him ravenously hungry but it was always nine o'clock, sometimes ten, occasionally later, before she yelled across the hall to where he sat sipping sherry in the drawing-room: "Come and get it if you want it. And if you don't want it—" the rest of the sentence asphyxiated in coughing.

Sometimes, so late at night, he did not want it. Excellent though the food often was, he found himself not hungry any more. He sat inelastically at table, ate with his fork, and sipped a glass of claret, perhaps two. She, on the other hand, more than ever like the lioness, ravenous far beyond feeding-time, ate eyelessly, no longer seeing the food, the table, or himself through mists of gin.

"Forgot to tell you—Lewis saw that kid riding through the place again today. Rode clean through the courtyard, by the cucumber house, and out the other side."

"Good heavens, didn't Lewis choke her off?"

"Gave her hell, he says."

"And what happened? What did she say?"

"Said she'd been told it was perfectly all right. You'd never mind."

"But, good grief," he said, "we can't have that. We can't have strangers riding through the place as if it's their own. That won't do. That simply won't do—"

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" All right," she said. " All right. You tell her. I've told her. Lewis has told her. Now you tell her. It's your turn."

She lit a cigarette, pushed more food into her mouth, and began laughing. A little stream of bright crimson tomato sauce ran down her chin. A shred or two of tobacco clung to her front teeth and there was actually a touch of pink, the first bloodshot vein or two, in the whites of her eyes.

" But who *is* she? "

" Search me. *You* find out. It's *your* turn—"

Open-mouthed, she laughed again across the table, the cigarette dangling this time from the lower lip as she mockingly pointed her glass at his face.

He knew that this gesture of fresh derision meant that she no longer saw him very well. Already the eyes had begun their swimming unfocused dilations. " All right," he said. " I'll speak to her."

" Good," she said. " That's the brave Harry. Brave old Harry." As she threw back her head, laughing openly now, letting the cigarette fall into her plate of half-eaten food, revealing relics of her last mouthful smeared across her lips and her tongue, he did not ask himself why he had ever married her. It was too late for asking that kind of question.

" When does she appear? " he said.

" Oh, off and on. Any time. On and off—"

" I'll try to catch her on Saturday," he said. " Or Sunday."

Derisively and deliberately she raised her hand, not laughing now, in a sort of mock benediction.

" Now don't be rash, Harry, dear, brave old Harry," she said. " Don't be rash. She might catch you."

On the following Sunday morning, as he walked up past the cucumber house to where a path led through two wicket gates to the meadows beyond, a light breeze was coming off the little river, bringing with it the scent of a few late swathes of hay. The glass of the cucumber house, with its dark under-tracery of leaves, flashed white in the sun. The summer had been more stormy than fine, with weeks of August rain, and now, in mid September, the fields were flush with grasses.

He stopped to look inside the cucumber house. Under the glass the temperature had already risen to ninety-five. Thick green vines dripped with steamy moisture. Numbers of cucumbers, dark and straight, hung down from dense masses of leaves that shut out the strong morning sun.

The cucumbers were his wife's idea. She was very imaginative, he had to admit, about cucumbers. Whereas the average person merely sliced up cucumbers, made them into sandwiches, or simply ate them with fresh salmon for lunch in summer, his wife was acquainted with numberless recipes in which cucumbers were cooked, stuffed like aubergines, or served with piquant sauces or high flavours such as Provençale.

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Harry Bamfield did not care much for cucumbers. More often than not, cooked or uncooked, they gave him wind, heart-burn, or chronic indigestion. But over the years of his married life he had learnt to eat them because he was too good-natured to deny his wife the chance of surprising guests with dishes they had never heard of before. He well understood her cucumbers and her little gastronomic triumphs with them.

That Sunday morning, as he stood under the steaming shadowy vines, he thought he saw, suddenly, a bright yellow break of sunlight travel the entire length of the glasshouse outside. The leaves of the cucumbers were so thick that it was some moments before he grasped that this was, in fact, a person riding past him on a horse.

Even then, as he discovered when he rushed out of the cucumber house, he was partly mistaken. The horse was merely a pony, blackish brown in colour, with a loose black tail.

With impatience he started to shout after it, "Hi! you there! Where do you think you're going? Don't you know—?" and then stopped, seeing in fact that its rider was nothing more than a young girl in a yellow sweater, jodhpurs, black velvet cap, and pigtails. The pigtails too were black and they hung long and straight down the yellow shoulders, tied at the ends not with ribbon, but with short lengths of crimson cord.

The girl did not stop. He started to shout again and then, quite without thinking, began to run after her.

"Young lady!" he called. "Young lady! one moment, young lady, one moment, please—"

It was thirty or forty yards farther on before he caught up with her. By that time she had stopped, bent down, and was already lifting the catch of the first of the wicket gates with the handle of her riding-crop.

"Just a moment, young lady, just one moment—" As he stopped he found himself short of breath and panting a little. She turned very slightly in the saddle to look at him. Her eyes were big, brown, motionless, and unusually circular. They seemed, like his own, rather large for the face.

"Aren't you aware," he said, "that this is private property—this path? It's private property!"

She did not move. She looked, he thought, fifteen, perhaps sixteen, not more than that, though rather big for her age. The sleeves of the yellow jumper were half-rolled up, showing firm brown forearms that glistened with downy golden hairs. Her face was the same golden-brown colour, the lips without make-up, so that they too had a touch of brown.

"You really can't ride through here like this," he said. "You've been told before. You really can't, you know."

Again she did not move. He did not know if the large motionless eyes were utterly insolent or merely transfixed in frightened innocence and he was still trying to make up his mind about it when he noticed how straight but relaxed she sat on the pony.

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He had to admit, even in vexation, that she sat very well; very well indeed, he thought.

"It's very tiresome," he said, "all this. You simply can't ride roughshod over other people's property like this."

"Roughshod?"

Her voice surprised him very much by its deepness. It almost seemed, he thought, like the voice of a woman twice her age.

"Do you really think," she said, "I'm riding roughshod?"

The eyes, still holding him in enormous circles of inquiring innocence, disarmed him with sheer brightness.

"That's neither here nor there," he said. "The simple fact is that you cannot ride when and how you please over other people's property."

"I was told I could."

"Told? By whom?"

"My mother."

At this moment his spectacles began to mist over. For the next second or two she seemed to melt away and become lost to him.

Uneasily he thought to himself that he ought to take his spectacles off, polish them, and put them back again. He began to feel inexplicably nervous about this and his hands groped about his face. Then when he realized that if he took off his spectacles he would, with his weak, short-sighted eyes, be able to see her even less well, he made the unfortunate compromise of trying to look over the top of them.

She smiled.

"Your mother?" he said. "What has your mother to do with it? Do you mean I know your mother?"

"You *knew* her," she said.

"Oh! and when, pray, would that be?" He had not the slightest idea why he should ask that question and in fact she ignored it completely.

"My name is Valerie Whittington," she said.

"Oh yes. I see. Oh yes," he said slowly. "Oh yes." He was so intensely surprised that, without thinking, he at once took off his spectacles and rubbed the lenses on his coat sleeve.

"Is the Colonel—?"

"He died last year," the girl said.

He polished the lenses of the spectacles quickly on the coat sleeve.

"We've taken the gamekeeper's cottage at Fir Top. I don't suppose you know it," she said.

"Oh yes." Something made him keep the spectacles in his hand a little longer.

"I can ride down through the park and along by the river and then back through the woods across the hill," the girl said. "It's a complete circle if I take the path through here. If not, I have to go back the same way again and you know how it is. It's never so nice going back the same way."

He murmured something about no, it was never so nice, and then put on his spectacles. Clear, fresh, and with that remarkable

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blend of insolence and innocent charm, she stared down at him, making him feel a fumbling idiot.

"So it was your mother told you about the path?"

"She just said she was sure you wouldn't mind."

Why, he wondered, did she say that?

"She said you were the sort of man who never did mind."

Again he felt baffled and stupid.

Then, for the first time, the pony moved. Up to that moment she had kept it remarkably still and it was in fact so quiet, standing erect in the hot September sun, that he had been almost unaware that it was there until now, suddenly, it reared its head and shuddered.

Instinctively he put one hand on its flank to calm it down. It quietened almost immediately and she said, "I'm afraid he's really not big enough for me. But he's the best we can afford for the time."

She ran her hand down the pony's neck, leaning forward as she did so. He saw the muscles of the neck light up like hard silk. At the same time he saw the flanks of the girl tauten, smooth out, and then relax again.

"Does your mother ride now?" he said.

"No," she said. "Not now."

"She used to ride very well."

"Yes. She said you'd remember."

Again he felt baffled; again he groped towards his spectacles.

"I'll be putting up jumps next week," he said. "In the meadow there. You could—well, I mean if you cared—you could use them. I'm never here weekdays."

She smiled as if to begin to thank him but a flash of light from the cucumber house caught the pony's eye, making it rear.

"You'd better turn him round," he said, "and take him along. It's the sun on the cucumber house—remember me to your mother, will you?"

"I will," she said.

She rode through the gate. He shut the gate after her, leaned on it, and watched her ride, at a walk, up the path. After forty or fifty yards the path began to go uphill to where, against the skyline, clumps of pine grew from browning bracken hillocks before the true woods began. The morning was so clear that he could see on the tips of these pines the stiff fresh crusts of the light olive summer cones. He could see also the brown arms of the girl under the rolled sleeves of the yellow sweater, the flecks of white on the short legs of the pony, and the knots of red on the pigtails.

He was suddenly aware that there was something disturbing about her without being able to say what it was. In that insolent way of hers she rode very well, he thought, but the pony was quite ridiculous. Her body and the pony simply did not fit each other, any more than her body and her voice seemed part of the same person.

"Edna should get her a horse," he said aloud and then, with

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sweat breaking out again from under his misty spectacles, began to walk back to the cucumber house.

Soon after that he began to come home on late September evenings to a recurrence of mild gin-dry quips from Katey.

"Your girl-friend was jumping again today. Here most of the morning and back again before I'd swallowed lunch. Stayed till five. I'd have offered her a bed but I wasn't tight enough."

"I wish you wouldn't call her my girl-friend."

"Best I can think of, Harry. You put her up to this game."

Presently she began to use his jumps not only on weekdays but on Saturdays and Sundays too. Sometimes he would wake as early as eight o'clock, look out across the meadows, and see the yellow sweater dipping between the barriers of brushwood.

At first he found it an embarrassment, slight but uneasy, to join her at the jumps. For two weekends he did not jump at all. At the third he heard a clatter of pony hoofs on the stable yard, looked up to see her long legs astride the pony, and heard her deep voice say, "I thought you must be ill, Mr. Bamfield, because you weren't jumping. Mother sent me to inquire."

Her voice, deeper than ever, he thought, startled and disturbed him; and he fumbled for words.

"Oh no, oh no. Perfectly all right, thank you. Oh no. It's just that the countryside has been looking so lovely that I've been giving the jumps a miss and riding up on the hill instead. In fact I'm just going up there now."

"Do you mind if I ride that way with you?" she said.

Some minutes later they were riding together up the hillside.

"You can smell that wonderful, wonderful scent of pines," she said.

He lifted his face instinctively to breathe the scent of pines and instead was distracted, for it might have been the fiftieth time, by her incongruous legs scratching the lowest tips of bracken fronds as she rode.

"My wife and I were having a slight argument as to how old you were," he said. "Of course it's rude to guess a lady's age but—"

"Oh, I'm ancient," she said. "Positively and absolutely ancient."

He started to smile.

"And how old," she said, "did you say?"

"Oh, fifteen," he said at once, not really thinking at all. "Perhaps I'll give you sixteen."

"Give me sixteen," she said. "And then seventeen. And then eighteen. And then if you like—"

She stopped. Looking up from the pony she turned on him the enormous circular eyes that appeared so often to be full of naïve insolence and then waited for him, as it were, to recover his breath.

"And then nineteen. And then if you like, next month, you can come to my twentieth birthday."

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He was too staggered to bring to this situation anything but absolute silence as they rode to the hilltop.

"I think you're surprised," she said.

"Oh no, oh no," he said. "Well, yes and no, in a way—"

"Don't you think I look twenty?"

"Well, it's not always absolutely easy—"

"How do you demonstrate age?" she said and he rode to the crest of the hilltop without an answer, his head sweating under his close tweed cap, his spectacles misting and turning to a premature fog-bound landscape the entire valley of morning brilliance below.

He was temporarily saved from making a complete and disastrous fool of himself by hearing the pony breathing hard, in partial distress. "I think you should give him a blow," he said. "It's a pretty long drag up here."

She thought so too and they both began dismounting. Then, as she swung to the ground, he had a second surprise.

This, he suddenly realized, was the first time he had actually seen her when not on the pony. Standing there, at his own level, she seemed to enlarge and straighten up. He was aware of a pair of splendid yellow shoulders. Riding had made her straight in the back, throwing her breasts well forward, keeping her head erect and high. She was also, he now discovered with fresh uneasiness, taller than he was.

He turned away to tie his horse to a pine. When he had finished he looked round to see her walking, with surprisingly delicate strides for so tall a girl, towards the ridge of the hillside.

Finally she stopped, turned, and waved to him. For a single moment he thought she had in her hand a flower of some kind and it looked, he thought, like a scarlet poppy. Then he saw that it was one of the cords she had snatched from her pigtails.

"Come over and look at the view," she called.

By the time he joined her she was sitting down in a patch of bracken. He sat down too; looking, not at the view below him, the map of copse and pasture and hedgerow flecked already with the occasional pure bright chrome of elm and hornbeam, the dense oaks and grass still green as summer, but at the sight of the girl now unplaiting and combing out the mass of bright brown hair into a single tail.

"You look surprised," she said, "but then I notice you always do."

She started to let her hair fall loosely over her shoulders, until it half enclosed her face. Then she put her hand in the pocket of her jodhpurs and pulled out a powder compact, a lipstick, and lastly a small oval mirror with a blue enamel back.

"Do you mind holding that?" she said.

He held the mirror in front of her face. Once or twice she stretched forward, touched his hand, and moved the mirror to one side or the other.

In silence, for perhaps the next five minutes or so, he watched her make up her face. He saw the lips, freed of their dull brownness,

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thicken, becoming very full, almost over-full, in redness. He saw her smooth with the powder-pad the skin of her face, giving it a tone of milky brown.

Finally she threw back her hair from her shoulders and he had time to notice that the enlargement of the lips, so bright now and almost pouting, had the effect of bringing into proportion the large brown eyes.

"How do I look?" she said.

His immediate impression was that the make-up, the loosened hair, and the fuller, brighter lips had softened her completely. It was very like the effect on parched grass of warm and heavy rain. At the same time he could not help feeling desperately, awkwardly, and embarrassingly sorry for her.

"Now do I look twenty?" she said.

It was on the tip of his tongue to say, "More—older," and afterwards he knew that it would have pleased her very much if he had, but he said instead; "What made you do that just now? just here?"

"Oh God!" she said and the sepulchral wretched cry of her deep voice shocked him so much that his mouth fell open. "I'm so miserable— Oh God! I can't tell you how miserable I am."

She turned suddenly and, not actually sobbing but with a harsh choke or two, lay face downwards in the bracken, beating her hands on the ground.

Pained and discomforted, he started to move towards her. She seemed to sense the movement and half leapt up.

"Don't touch me!" she howled.

It was the furthest thing from his mind. He stood for a moment with his mouth open and then started blunderingly to walk away.

"Where are you going?" she moaned.

At that second sepulchral cry he stopped. "I thought you'd rather have it out by yourself."

"I don't want to have it out!" she said. "I don't want to have it out! Don't you see? I don't want to have it out!"

It was beyond him to see and he wished unhappily that he were back home, jumping or talking to Lewis or having a glass of sherry with Charles Peters, his neighbour, or with Punch Warburton, who sometimes came over and talked horses and weather and general gossip before Sunday lunch-time.

"Then what do you want?" he said.

"God only knows," she said quietly. "God knows. God only knows."

By that time she was really crying and he was sensible enough to let her go on with it for another ten minutes or so. During that time he sat on the ground beside her, mostly staring uneasily across the bracken in fear that somebody he knew would come past and see him there.

That would be a miserable situation to be caught in but, as it happened, nobody came. There was in fact hardly a sound on the hilltop and hardly a movement except an occasional late butterfly

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hovering about the blackberries or a rook or two passing above the pines.

When she had finished crying she sat up. The first thing she did was to begin to wipe off the lipstick. She wiped it off quite savagely, positively scrubbing at it with a handkerchief, until her lips again had that dry brownish undressed look about them.

Then she started to plait her hair. When she had finished one plait she held the end of it in her mouth while she tied it with the cord. Then she did the same with the other. Then she tossed the two plaits back over her shoulders and, with a rough hand sweep, straightened the rest of her hair flat with her hands.

"There," she said bitterly, "how will that do?"

The bitterness in her voice profoundly shocked him. "It can't be as bad as all that," he said, "can it?"

Her eyes stared at him, blank and sour. "As bad as all what?"

"Well, whatever—can't you tell me?"

"I've never told anybody," she said. "I wouldn't know how to begin."

He started to say something about how much better it was if you could get these things off your chest when he saw her standing up. Once again, for the second time that morning, he was aware of the splendid yellow shoulders, her tallness, and the contradiction of the ridiculous scarlet-fastened pigtails with the rest of her body.

"I'd better get back," she said, "before she starts creating hell at me."

"She?"

"Mother," she said. "Oh, by the way, I almost forgot. She sent a message for you."

"For me?"

"She says will you be sure to come along on Tuesday evening for a drink? She's having a few friends in. About seven o'clock."

He began to say something about his train not always getting in on time, but she cut him short: "I think you'd better try and make it if you can. She said to tell you she positively won't take no for an answer."

"Well, I shall have to see—"

"You won't," she said. "You know mother, don't you?"

"I did know her. Years ago—"

"If you knew her then," she said, "you know her now."

A few minutes later, at the crest of the hill, he was holding her foot in the stirrup while she mounted the pony.

After that they rode, also in silence, for two hundred yards along the hilltop to where the path forked and she said, "This is my way back. Thank you for everything. Don't forget Tuesday. I'll get it in the neck if you do."

This again was beyond him and he said simply, raising his cap, "I'll do what I can. Good-bye. And no more crying now. No more of that."

She turned, rested one hand on the rump of the pony and stared, not at him but completely and far past him, with empty eyes. "If

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you listen carefully," she said; " you'll probably hear me howling across the hill in the night-time."

It was past half past seven and already dark, the following Tuesday evening, when he drove up to the old Keeper's cottage on the opposite side of the hill. There were lights in the narrow mullioned windows of the little house, but, much to his surprise, no other cars.

Edna Whittington herself came to the door to answer his ring, holding in her left hand a half-empty glass and a cigarette in a bright yellow amber holder.

" Sweet of you, Henry. Absolutely and typically sweet."

As she leaned forward so that he could kiss her first on one cheek and then the other, he caught an overpowering fragrance, sickly in the night air. He did not fail to notice how she called him Henry.

" But come in, Henry, come in, come in, you sweet man. Let's look at you."

He went in and, inside, discovered that the house was empty.

" I'm sorry I'm so late," he said.

With magenta-nailed fingers she took his black homburg hat and umbrella and laid them on a window-sill. " The train lost time." He looked round the room to make perfectly sure, for a second time, about its emptiness. " Has everybody gone? "

" Everybody gone? "

" I thought it was a party."

" Party? " she said. " Whoever said it was a party? "

" Valerie."

" Oh, my little girl," she said. " That little girl. My silly little girl."

He started to say that he thought the girl had been pretty emphatic about the party but Edna Whittington laughed, cutting him short, and said, " She never gets it right, Henry. Never gets anything right, the silly child, just never gets it right."

" Isn't she here either? "

" Out to a little birthday party," she said. " Just a teeny-weeny affair."

She poured him a glass of sherry. Her voice was husky. It was nearly twenty-five years since he had seen her before and he remembered, in time, that the voice had always been husky.

" Well, cheers, Henry," she said. " Resounding numbers of cheers. Lots of luck."

She raised her glass, looking at him with chilled, squinting, remarkably white-blue eyes. Her hair was bluish too and there were shadows of blue, almost violet, in the powder on her face. Her chest, flattish, was steely and bare, except for a double row of pearls, to the beginnings of the creased pouches of her breasts, and her face had a strange bony prettiness except in the mouth, which twisted upward at one side.

" Come and sit here on the sofa and tell me all about yourself.

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Tell me about life. Here, dear man—not there. Just the old Henry—afraid that something will bite you."

He did not think, he said, as he sat beside her on the settee, that he had anything very much of himself to tell; or of life for that matter.

"Well, I have," she said. "Here we've been in the neighbourhood six months and not a bleat from you."

"I honestly didn't know you were here."

"Then you honestly should have done. It was in all the papers. I mean about the Colonel. Didn't you read about that?"

He had to confess, with growing wretchedness, that he hadn't even read in the papers about the Colonel, who had dropped down of thrombosis a year before. Nevertheless he was, he said, very sorry. It was a sad thing, that.

"He'd got awfully fat," she said. "And of course marrying late and so on. He was a man of forty-five before Valerie was born."

He knew that it was not only the Colonel but she too who had married very late. He sat thinking of this, sipping his sherry, watching a meagre fire of birch logs smouldering in the round black grate, and she said, "Yes, I call it pretty stodgy, Henry. Two miles away and not a single lamb's peep out of you. The trouble is you live in a stew-pot."

"Now here, I say—"

"Well, don't you? Up to town with *The Times* in the morning. Down from town with *The Standard* in the evening. If that isn't stew-potism tell me what is. Doesn't anything else go on in these parts?"

"Oh, blow it," he said, "it isn't as bad as that."

"Isn't it?" she said. "I think it's absolutely fungoid."

He suddenly felt very slightly incensed at this and went on to explain, as calmly as he could, how you sometimes held parties, had people to dinner, went in spring to the point-to-points, and, damn it, in winter, hunted quite a lot. He didn't think you could call that stew-potism, could you?

"There's the Hunt Ball in a month's time too," he reminded her finally. "You can chalk that up for a whale of a time."

"I would," she said, "if anybody had invited me."

Before he realized what he was saying, he said, "I'll invite you. Both of you. Delighted."

"Oh, the child could never come."

"No?" He could not think why on earth the girl could never come.

"She's a mere infant, Henry. Hardly out of the shell. She never does these things. Besides, I'd never let her."

"Why?"

"Oh Henry, she isn't fledged. She's only half grown. She isn't fit for that sort of thing. You know what these hunt affairs are too. Wolf-packs. Those gangs are not hunts for nothing."

In his direct, harmless, simple way, the way in which, as every-

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body always said, there was never any malice, he said, " But you'd come, wouldn't you? "

" Like a lamplighter, Henry. Absolutely adore to."

He began to murmur something in polite satisfaction about this when she added, " That's if Katey wouldn't explode."

" I don't think Katey would mind."

That, he always thought, was one nice thing about Katey. She was a good sport, Katey: never jealous in that way.

" And how," she said, " is Katey? "

He shrugged his shoulders: as if there were nothing of very great moment to tell of Katey.

" Tell me about her, Henry," she said. " You can tell me."

There was nothing, he thought, that he possibly wanted to tell.

" I'm sorry," she said, " have I boobed? I simply thought—well, people talk and you know how it is. Somehow I got the impresh—well, you know the impresh one gets—that you and Katey weren't pulling all that steamingly well in harness."

He was roused by the increasing absurdity of her language. She was like a piece of iced cake that one finds in a silvered box, in a forgotten drawer, among silver leaves, thirty years after the voices at the wedding have faded away. The brittle archaisms of the language were like the hard tarnished silver balls left on the cake. They had seemed so magnificently bright in his youth but now—Good God, had he and Edna and the rest of them really talked like that? If it hadn't been for that absurd, husky clipping voice of hers he would never have believed they had.

As if her thoughts were running in the same direction she said, " We had some great times, Henry. You and I and Vicky Burton and Freddie Anstruther and Peggy Forbes and Coral Chalmers and Floaty Dean—he was a bright moonbeam, Floaty—do you ever hear anything of any of the crowd? "

" I'm afraid I've lost touch with all of them."

" Well, not all, Henry. Don't say that. You haven't lost touch with me." Here, as so often in the conversation, she smiled, played with the pearls above the thin leathery bosom or extended, to its full length, the arm holding the dying cigarette in its yellow holder. " Do you remember a day on the river at Pangbourne? "

He pretended not to remember it while, in reality, remembering it very well. That day she had worn her pale yellow hair in a bob and a hat like a round pink saucepan. Her white dress had been waistless and she showed round pretty knees below the skirt.

There was no doubt in his mind that she too had been very pretty, and she said, " But you remember coming home, through the woods? You wanted to go with Coral but I wanted you to come with me. All the rhododendrons were out, big white and pale pink ones so that you could see them in the dark, and I made an honest man of you."

She laughed distastefully. " You don't *surely* forget, Henry, do you? " she said. " After all, it was the first time with you and me, even if it wasn't the last, and you know how—"

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"Look, Edna, we were all a bit crazy at that time and I don't think we have to drag it all—"

He was relieved to hear the sound of car brakes in the road outside. Then he heard a car door slam and the sound of feet running up the path outside.

A moment later Valerie Whittington came in. She was wearing a blue gabardine school mackintosh and a plain grey felt hat and white ankle socks above her plain flat shoes. The mackintosh was too long for her by several inches and when she started to take it off he saw that underneath it she was wearing a plain dark blue dress that was full and bushy in the skirt. It too was too long for her.

"Well, there you are at last, child. Say good evening to Mr. Bamfield before you go up. I know you know him because he was kind enough to let you use the path."

"Good evening, Mr. Bamfield."

He said good evening too and knew, as he did so, that she had the greatest difficulty in looking at him. He tried in vain to catch the big, brown, too-circular eyes.

"Well, up you go now, child. It's late. It's past your time. Say good night to Mr. Bamfield."

"Good night, Mr. Bamfield."

He nodded. He thought she made a sort of timid, half-urgent effort to protest but she turned away too quickly, leaving him unsure.

The last visible sign of what she might be thinking was a shudder of her lower lip, hard and quite convulsive, just before she turned, opened the door and went out without a word.

"I must go too," he said.

"Oh, not yet, Henry. Have another sherry—"

"No, no," he said. "Really, no, no. Katey will have dinner—"

"Give her a ping on the blower and say you'll be another half hour. We've hardly exchanged the sliver of a word—"

"No, honestly, Edna," he said. "Honestly I must go."

She came with him, at last, to the door. In the light from the door she stood for a moment gauntly, thinly framed, a piece of silver cardboard, and he thought again of the wedding cake. Then she half closed the door behind her. The October air was mild and windless but as she stretched out long fleshless arms to say good-bye he said hastily, "Don't come out. Don't get cold. I'm perfectly capable—"

"Good night, Henry," she said. "Sweet of you to come. And that's a date, then, isn't it? the Ball?"

"That's if you'd care—"

"Oh Henry!" She laughed huskily. "Care?"

She offered her face to be kissed. He made as if to inflict on it, somewhere between cheek and ear, a swift dab of farewell. The next moment he felt her thin fingers grasp him about the elbows. Then they moved up to his shoulders and suddenly she was offering her mouth instead.

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"You can do better than that, Henry, can't you?" she said. She laughed with what he supposed she thought was tenderness. Her voice crackled on its rising note with a brittle snap. "I know you can. From what I remember of the rhododendrons. And not only the rhododendrons."

"Look, Edna, I've already told you. That's all over long since," he said, and escaped, leaving her, mouth in air.

He was surprised, the following Sunday morning, when he suddenly saw walking across the bracken a tall figure in a black skirt and a puce-pink blouse.

It was a pigtail-less, hatless, horseless Valerie Whittington, waving her hand. "I thought it must be you," she said and even he was not too stupid to know that she must have been waiting for him there.

"Where's your pony?" he said.

"I've stopped riding."

"Oh?" It was all he could think of to say as he raised his cap, dismounted, and stood beside her.

He saw at once that she was wearing lipstick. She had also managed to bunch up her hair into thick brown curls and to make an effort to match the colour of her face to the puce pink of the blouse. Except for the evening at the cottage he had not seen her in skirts before and now he saw that her legs were long, well-shaped, and slender.

"Given up riding?" he said. "How is that?"

"I've just given up riding," she said.

Even from the tone of this remark he saw that she had changed a great deal. Like her voice, her face was grave, almost solemn, and her eyes seemed queer and distant.

"Have you got time to walk a little way?" she said.

He said yes, he had time, and they walked slowly, in cool sunshine, he leading the horse, to where he could see once again the entire valley of oak woods and pasture below. In a few weeks he would be hunting across it, drinking the first sharp draughts of winter.

"I'm afraid I behaved like a fool up here the other day," she said, "and I'm sorry about the other night."

He said he couldn't think why.

"Well, it's all over now," she said, "but I just wanted to say."

Exactly what, he asked, was all over now?

"Me," she said. "I'm leaving home. I'm going away."

It was typical of him instantly to ask her if she thought that was wise. "Wise or not," she said, "I'm going."

Everybody wanted to run away when they were young, he said, but it was like measles. You got over it in time and you were probably all the better for having been through the wretched thing.

"Yes, I'm better," she said. "Because I know where I'm going now. Thanks to you."

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He couldn't think what he possibly had to do with it and she said, "I like being with you. I grow up when I'm with you. Somehow you never take me away from myself."

That odd, solemn little pronouncement of hers affected him far more than her tears had ever done and he glanced quickly at her face. It was full of another, different kind of tearfulness, dry and barren, with a pinched sadness that started dragging at his heart.

"You know what I've been doing since last Sunday?" she said.

"No."

"Coming up here," she said.

"Yes?"

"Every day," she said. "Walking. Not with the pony—I haven't ridden the pony since that day. Just walking. I think I know every path here now. There's a wonderful one goes down there past the holly trees. You come to a little lake at the bottom with quince trees on an island—at least I think they're quince trees."

If he had time, she went on, she wanted him to walk down there. Would he? Did he mind?

He tethered his horse to a fence and they started to walk along a path that wound down, steeply in places, through crackling curtains of bracken, old holly trees thick with pink-brown knots of berry, and more clumps of birch trees sowing in absolute silence little yellow pennies of leaves.

At the bottom there was, as she had said, a small perfectly circular lake enclosed by rings of alder, willow, and hazel trees. In the still air its surface was thick with floating shoals of leaves. In absolute silence two quince trees, half-bare branches full of ungathered golden lamps of fruit, shone with apparent permanent candescence on a little island in the glow of noon.

"This is it," she said.

Neither then, nor later, nor in fact at any other time, did they say a word about her mother. They stood for a long time without a word about anything, simply watching the little lake soundlessly embalmed in October sunlight, the quince-lamps setting the little island half on fire.

"I don't think you should go away," he said.

"Why not?"

He answered her in the quiet, totally uncomplex way that, as everyone so often remarked, was so much part of him, so much the typical Harry Bamfield.

"I don't want you to," he said.

She started to say something and then stopped. He looked at her face. He thought suddenly that it had lost the dry, barren tearfulness.

Now it looked uncomplicated, alight, and free, and the big glowing brown eyes seemed to embrace him with a wonderful look of gratitude.

"What were you going to say?" he said.

"Nothing."

"You were," he said.

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" I was," she said, " but now it doesn't matter."

All at once she laid her hands on his shoulders, drawing them slowly down until, quite nervously, she plucked at the lapels of his jacket. In shyness she could not look at him. She could only stare at her own fingers as she drew them slowly up and down.

Suddenly she let them fly up to his uncertain, spectacled, honest face with a breaking cry.

" Oh my God, hold me," she said. " Hold me—just hold me, will you? for God's sake, please just hold me—"

In a stupid daze Harry Bamfield held her; and from across the lake the sound of a duck's wing flapping somewhere about the island of quinces reached him, long afterwards, like the echo of a stone dropping far away at the bottom of a well.

Soon, as the autumn went on, his friends the city gentlemen began to notice a strange, unforetold change in his habits. No longer was it possible, on two or three days a week, sometimes more, to wait with expectation and cheers to put the grappling hooks on Harry Bamfield as he ran, spectacled and panting, to catch the evening train.

The reason for this was a simple one: Harry Bamfield was, on these evenings, not there to be grappled.

By the time the train departed he was already away in the country saying good-bye to the girl on the hillside or, in bad weather, as they sat in his car by the road. A train at two-thirty gave him an hour or more before, at six o'clock, he watched her, with a dry twist in his heart, walk away into twilights filled more and more with storms of blowing leaves.

Earlier in the afternoon they walked by the little lake. As late as the first week in November the lamps of the quinces hung miraculously suspended from the grey central islands of boughs and then gradually, one by one, dropped into the frosted reeds below.

By the middle of November there remained, on the south side of the island, where the sun caught it full in the early afternoons, one quince, the last of the autumn lanterns, and as Harry Bamfield and the girl came down the path through thinning alder trees she got into the way of running on ahead of him to the edge of the lake, always giving the same little cry, " Look, Harry, our quince is still there! "

For about a week longer they watched, as if it were some marvellously suspended planet glowing above the wintry stretches of water where thin ice sometimes lingered white all day in the thickest shadow of reeds, the last remaining quince, suspended bare and yellow on frost-stripped boughs.

" When it falls I shall feel the summer has gone completely," the girl said.

Soon Harry Bamfield felt as she did: that this was the summer poured into a single phial of honey. When it fell and spilt at last he knew he would hear, dark and snapping, the breath of winter.

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By the fifteenth day of the month the quince, looking bigger and more golden than ever in an afternoon of pure, almost shrill blue sky already touched on the horizon by the coppery threat of frost, still remained.

"Look, Harry!" the girl said, "our quince is still there!"

For some time they walked slowly by the lake. In the breathless blue afternoon the one remaining globe of fruit glowed more than ever like the distillation of all the summer.

"It's nearly two months now," the girl said, "since we first started to see each other. Have you been happy?"

He started to say that he had never been so happy but she cut him short and said, "What made you happy?"

He could not think what had made him happy except, perhaps, that he had been freed, at last, from the shackles of his daily ride in the train, the banterings of the city gentlemen, and above all from the evening crackle of Katey's voice calling that she hoped to God he hadn't forgotten the gin. But before he had time to reply the girl said, "I'll tell you why it is. It's because you've made someone else happy. Me, in fact."

"I'm glad about that," he said.

"You see," she said, "it's like shining a light. You shine it and it reflects back at you."

"But supposing," he said in his simple, straightforward way, "there's nothing to reflect back from?"

"Oh, but there is," she said. "There's me."

He smiled at this and a moment later she stopped, touched his arm, and said, "Harry, I wonder if you feel about it the same way as I do? Shall I tell you how I feel? I feel in a wonderful way that you and I have been growing up together."

He hadn't a second in which to answer this odd remark before, across the lake, the quince fell with a thud, almost a punch, into the reeds below. The sound startled the girl so much that she gave a sudden dismaying gasp: "Oh Harry, it's gone! The quince has gone—oh Harry, look, it's empty without it!"

He stared across to the island and saw that it was, as she said, quite empty.

"Now," she said, "it's winter."

He thought he caught for the briefest possible moment a colder breath of air rising from the lake, but it was in fact her shadow crossing his face, shutting out the sun, as she turned and looked at him.

"The quince has gone and it's winter," she said. "The week has gone and tomorrow it's Friday. Have you forgotten?"

"Friday?" he said. "Forgotten?"

"Friday," she said, "is the Hunt Ball."

"Good God, I'd forgotten," he said.

Now it was her turn to smile and she said, "Whatever you do you mustn't forget. You simply mustn't. You're coming to fetch us. Will you dance with me?"

"If—" he was about to say, "If your mother will let you," but

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he checked himself in time and said, " If you don't mind being trodden on. It's some time since I danced, especially to modern things."

" I've a new dress," she said.

There crossed his mind the picture of her coming home, as he vividly remembered it, from the birthday party: the dress long, straight, and blue under the blue school mackintosh; and he felt his heart once again start to ache for her, afraid of what she would wear.

" Nobody has seen it," she said.

It was on the tip of his tongue to say, " Not even—" when he checked himself again and she said, " I hope you'll like me in it. Nobody knows about it. I bought it alone, by myself. It's the colour of— No, I won't tell you after all. You'll see it tomorrow and then you can tell me if it reminds you of anything."

Suddenly she stretched up her arms in a short delightful gesture. " You will dance with me," she said, " won't you? A lot? "

" I warn you—" he said, and then: " I'm pretty awful."

" I don't believe it," she said. " Show me. Dance with me now."

For the second time she held up her arms. She put her left arm lightly on his shoulder and he took her other hand.

" I'll hum the tune," she said. " Listen carefully."

She started humming something but although he listened carefully he could not recognize at all what tune it was.

" You'll have to guide me," she said. " My eyes are shut. I always dance with my eyes shut. And by the way next week I'm twenty. Ancient. Had you forgotten? "

He had forgotten too about that.

" You dance nicely—very nicely—we go together—nicely—nicely together—"

She started to sing the words to the tune she was humming, the tune he did not recognize, and as he danced to it, steering her about the frost-bared path along the lake, he remembered the sound of the quince dropping into the reeds, the last vanishing phial of the summer's honey, filling his mind like a golden ominous echo.

When he called alone at the Keeper's cottage next evening about half past eight he saw at once that all his fears were justified. It was she who opened the door; and already, as he saw, she was wearing the blue school mackintosh. He even thought he caught, as she turned her head, a glimpse of two pigtails tucked inside the half-turned-up collar at the back.

Nervously picking first at his silk evening scarf and then his black homburg hat, he stood in the little sitting-room and wished, for once, that Edna was there.

" Mother will be a few minutes yet," the girl said. " She always takes an awful time. She said I was to give you sherry. Or is there something else you'd rather have? "

He was about to say that sherry would suit him perfectly when

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she smiled, leaned close to him, and said, "This, for instance?"

She kissed him lightly. Her lips, not made up, with that curious undressed brownish look about them, rested on his mouth for no more than a second or two and then drew away.

"How many dances," she said, "are you going to dance with me?"

"Well—"

"Dance with me all evening."

"I shall have to dance with your mother—"

"Dance once with Mother and then all the rest with me." Again she kissed him lightly on the lips. "All night. For ever. Dance with me for ever."

Miserably, a few moments later, he took the glass of sherry she poured out for him.

"I'm not allowed to drink," she said. "But I'm going to. Mother will be ages."

With increasing wretchedness he saw her pour another glass of sherry, hold it up to him, and say, "Do you know what I used to say when I was a child and wanted to describe something that was very, very good?"

"No."

"I used to call it the bestest good one." She laughed with large shining eyes and drank half the sherry in a gulp. "Here's to our evening. May it be the bestest good one in the world."

All this time she kept the blue gabardine school mackintosh closely buttoned at the neck. He would not have been surprised to see that her stockings were black, though in fact they were flesh-coloured, and once he found himself looking down at her black flat-heeled shoes.

"Oh, that reminds me," she said. "Would you hide these in the car for me? They're my dancing-shoes."

He took the brown-paper parcel she gave him and went out to the car and put the parcel on the back seat. The night was starry and crisp, with a half moon in the west.

Immediately, as he got back to the house, he heard the husky voice of Edna Whittington asking where he was.

In the sitting-room she greeted him with outstretched thin bare arms, fingers downward crooked. "Henry. I thought you were leaving us, trotting out there in the cold. I thought my little girl wasn't looking after you."

She was wearing a skin-tight dress that looked, he thought, as if it were made of silver mail. It made her look more than ever like a sere cardboard leaf left over from a wedding cake. Her long fingernails and her lips were a sharp magenta and the skin of her chest and face was powdered to a rosy-violet shade.

"No Katey?" Her voice was full of petulant mock regret.

He apologized and said that Katey was, on the whole, not a great one for dancing.

"Poor Katey. Well, anyway, all the more luck for me."

In the intervals of talking and, he thought, smiling too much,

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she poured herself a glass of sherry and then filled up his own. All this time the girl stood apart, schoolgirlish, meek, hands in the pockets of her mackintosh, not speaking.

"Henry," Edna Whittington said, "it's terribly sweet of you to take us to this thing and it's mean of me to ask another favour. But would you?"

"Of course."

"What time does this affair break up?"

"Oh, hard to say," he said. "Three or four. I've known it to be five."

"Shambles?"

"Quite often," he said. "Well, it's the Hunt Ball and you know how people are."

"I know how people are and that's why I wanted to ask you. Would you," she said, "be an absolute lamb and bring Valerie back by one o'clock? I've promised her she can come on that one condition."

"If you think—"

"I do think and you're an absolute lamb. She doesn't mind being alone in the house and then you can come back for me and we'll stay on to the end."

The girl did not speak or move. Her large brown eyes were simply fixed straight ahead of her, as if she actually hadn't heard.

Ten minutes later the three of them drove off, Edna Whittington sitting beside him at the wheel, wearing only a white long silk shawl as a wrap, the girl at the back, motionless and obliterated in the darkness, without a word.

"Oh, look! they've floodlit the mansion! The whole place looks like a wedding cake!"

As he turned the car into tall high park gates Edna Whittington's voice ripped at the night air with a husky tear. At the end of a long avenue of bare regiments of chestnut a great house seemed to stare with a single candescent eye, pure white, across black spaces of winter parkland. And as the car drew nearer he thought that it looked, as she said, like a wedding cake, just as she herself, thin, shining and silver, looked more than ever like a leaf of it that had been long since torn away.

Less than ten minutes later he was inside the long central hall of the mansion—bright with chandeliers and crowded already with dancers, many of them his acquaintances of the hunting field, some his friends the city gentlemen—hearing Edna Whittington say with a smile of her bony, pretty magenta mouth, "It's over twenty years since I danced with you, Henry, and I can't wait to have a quick one. What are they playing? What are you looking at?"

"I was wondering," he said, "where Valerie had—"

A moment later, before he could complete the sentence or she could answer it, he felt himself pressed to the thin sheer front of her body and borne away.

It might have been half an hour, perhaps only twenty minutes,

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when he turned in the middle of the second of his dances with Edna Whittington and became the victim of exactly the same kind of momentary illusion that he had suffered one brilliant Sunday morning in the cucumber house.

For a second or two, out of the corner of his eye, he thought he saw a strange but remotely recognizable fragment of yellow light cross a far corner of the room and disappear behind a triangular tier of pink chrysanthemums.

He was suddenly stunned to realize that this was Valerie Whittington, wearing a remarkably long pale yellow dress and long black gloves that showed her pale bare upper arms and her completely naked back and shoulders. He was so numbed by this appearance that only one thought raced through his head, in reality the rapid recollection of something she had said by the lake on the previous afternoon: " Nobody knows about it. It's the colour of— No, I won't tell you. You'll see it tomorrow and then you can tell me if it reminds you of anything."

Instantly he recalled the quinces and how the lamp of summer had gone out.

Somehow he got through the rest of the dance without betraying that he was in a turmoil of fright and indecision. He had broken out already into a cold and sickening sweat but as the dance ended he had presence of mind enough to mop his forehead with his handkerchief and say, " It's awfully hot in here, Edna. My glasses are getting misty. Do you mind if I go and clean them? And wouldn't you like a drink? Can I bring you something—gin and something?—would you?—by all means, yes—"

He escaped, spent five minutes in an empty back corridor breathing on his spectacles, polishing them, and then in sheer fright breathing on them again. After that he worked his way to the corner of the bar and restored himself with a whisky, saying desperately at the last moment, " No, a large one, large one, please."

Then he took the drink back into the corridor. He had hardly leaned against the wall and had actually not lifted the glass to his lips when he looked up and saw Valerie Whittington suddenly appear at the far end of the corridor as if she had in some miraculous way come up through a trapdoor.

She started to walk towards him. She walked quite slowly, upright, shoulders square and splendid, the motion of her legs just breaking the front of the dress with ripples. And across the vision of her walking slowly down towards him he caught for the flash of a second the former vision of her in the gabardine mackintosh, schoolgirlish, tense, and obliterated, the pigtails tucked into the collar at the back.

A moment later she was saying, " I know what you're thinking. You're thinking did I have it on under the mackintosh, aren't you?"

" Partly that—"

" I hadn't," she said. " It was easy. I got the shop to send it here. I'd hardly a thing on under the mackintosh."

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She started to smile. Her lips were made up, a palish red, and she had managed once again to pile her hair into a mass of curls. She did not speak again for a moment or two. She continued simply to smile at him with the large circular brown eyes that so often seemed to embrace him with tenderness, and then at last she said, " Does it remind you of anything? "

" Of course," he said.

To his surprise the two words seemed to move her very deeply and he saw that there were sudden tears in her eyes.

" You're the bestest good one in the world," she said and she pressed her face against his own.

He too found himself very moved by that. He wished he had nothing to do but take her by one of the long black gloves and into the dark spaces of parkland outside the house, but he remembered Edna Whittington.

Some of his anxiety about this must have crossed his face because almost immediately she said, " I'll tell you something else you're thinking too, shall I? "

Harry Bamfield, only too well aware of what he was thinking, could not answer.

" You're thinking you've got to dance with me."

" Well—"

He inclined his head a fraction down and away from her. When he looked up at her again he was struck by a wonderful air of composure about her face, the wide bare shoulders and especially the hands, black in their gloves, clasped lightly before the waistline of the yellow dress. She could not have looked more composed if she had been wearing the dress for the fiftieth instead of the first time but he knew, somehow, in spite of it all, that she was frightened.

" It's got to be done," she said, " and I can't do it without you."

He tried not to look into her eyes. They were no longer wet with even the suspicion of tears. They gazed back at him, instead, with an almost luminous composure and now, at last, she stretched out her hands.

" Come along," she said. " Take me."

If there had been no other person on the dance floor as he led her onto it some moments later he could hardly have felt more pained and conspicuous. It was like dancing in some sort of competition, naked, in the middle of an empty field, before a thousand spectators.

The amazing thing was that whenever he looked at the face of the girl it was still alight with that astonishing luminous composure. " Look at me," she said once. " Keep looking at me."

Whether she was thinking of her mother, as he was the whole time, he did not know. He could not see Edna Whittington. But as he danced he became more and more obsessed with the haunting impression that she was watching him from somewhere, evilly and microscopically, waiting for the dance to end.

When it did end he turned helplessly on the floor, arms still

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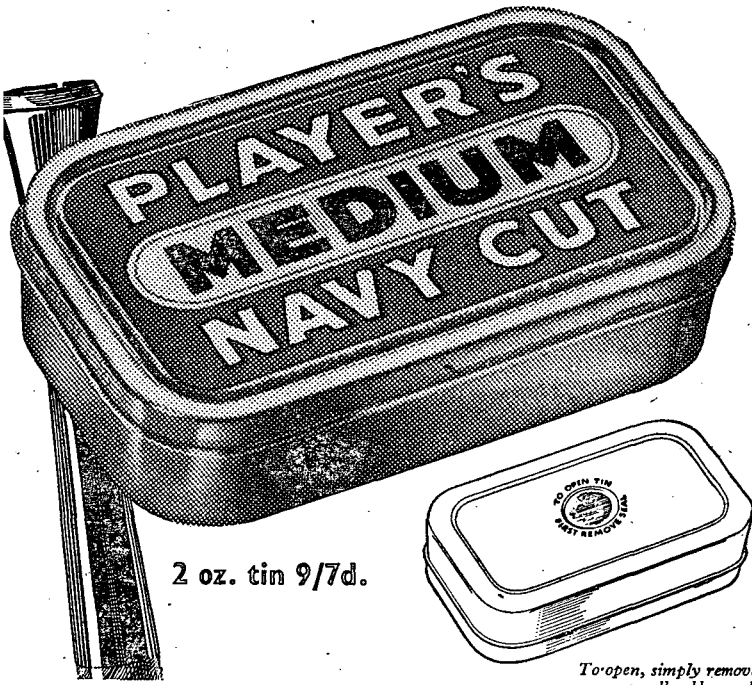

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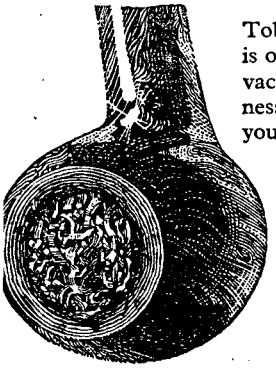

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outstretched, very much like a child learning to walk and suddenly deprived of a pair of helping hands. The girl, composed as ever, started to move away, the skin of her back shining golden in the light of the chandeliers. The dress itself looked, as she had meant it to do, more than ever the colour of quinces and he saw on her bare arms a bloom of soft down like that on the skin of the fruit.

Then as she turned, smiled at him with an amazing triumphant scrutiny, holding out her arm for him to take, he saw Edna Whittington.

She was standing not far from the tier of pink chrysanthemums. She did not look, now, like a piece of silver cardboard. She looked exactly like the perfectly straight double-edged blade of a dagger rammed point downwards into the floor: arms perfectly crossed, feet close together, thin body perfectly motionless under the tight silver dress, small microscopic eyes staring straight forward out of a carved white face, fixed on himself and the girl as they crossed the dance floor.

Suddenly he was no longer uneasy, self-conscious, or even disturbed. He began to feel strangely confident, almost antagonistic. And in this sudden change of mood he felt himself guide the arm of the girl, changing her course across the dance floor, steering her straight to Edna Whittington.

Suddenly the band started playing again. The girl gave a quick little cry of delight, turned to him, and put her hands on his shoulders. A moment later they were dancing.

Then, for what was to be the last time, she spoke of her mother. "Is she looking?"

"Yes."

"Tell me how she looks," she said. "You know I dance with my eyes closed."

"There's no need to think of her," he said.

Whether it was because of this simple remark of his he never knew, but suddenly she rested her face against his and spoke to him in a whisper.

"You don't know how happy I am," she said. "Oh, don't wake me, will you? Please don't wake me."

She spoke once more as they danced and it was also in a whisper. "If I told you I loved you here in the middle of the dance floor would you think it ridiculous?"

"That's the last thing I would ever think."

"I love you," she said.

At the end of the dance a frigid, pale, supernaturally polite Edna Whittington, holding a glittering yellow cigarette-holder in full-stretched magenta fingers, met them as they came from the floor. Rigidly and antagonistically he held himself ready to do some sort of brave and impossible battle with her and was surprised to hear her say, "You did book our table for supper, didn't you, Henry?"

"Of course."

"You should have told me where it was," she said. "Then I could have sat down."

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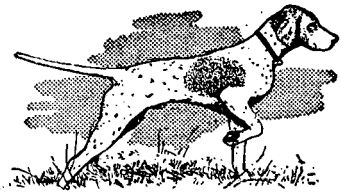

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Throughout the rest of the evening, until one o'clock, this was as sharp as the tone of her reproach and resentment ever grew. She regarded himself, the girl, the dancing, and even the dress, with the same smooth unmitigated calm. When he danced with her, as he did several times, she talked with a kind of repressed propriety, saying such things as: "It's a most pleasant evening, Henry. And not noisy. Not a brawl. Not half as crowded as I thought it would be."

"The Hunt's going through a difficult patch," he said. "Rather going down, I'm afraid. There aren't the chaps."

"You seem to know a lot of people, even so."

The more polite and calm she grew the more unreal, he thought, the night became. Alternately, he danced with herself and the girl, negative and positive, filled the two remaining hours till midnight. Friendly and bantering from across the floor came exchanges of manly pleasantry with friends like Punch Warburton, Freddie Jekyll, and George Reed Thompson, the city gentlemen, from odd acquaintances like Dr. Frobisher, Justice Smythe, and Colonel Charnly-Rose: stalwart chaps, the solid backbone of the Hunt.

Away somewhere in the distance lay the even greater unreality of Katey; Katey drowned throughout the years of his marriage in mists of gin, Katey the tawdry lioness, Katey with her garlic-raw, smoke-stained fingers, calling him a squeak-mouse.

He felt himself left, over and over again, with the one reality of his life that had ever meant anything. All the rest had shrivelled behind him like black burnt paper. Nothing made any sense in any sort of way any more, except the voice of the girl imploring him with the tenderest, most luminous happiness: "Oh, don't wake me, will you? Please don't wake me."

It would be the best possible thing now, he thought, to get it over quickly: to go straight to Katey, in the morning, and tell her what had happened and how, because of it, he could not go on with the old, damnable dreary way any longer.

He had arrived at this, the simplest of decisions, by midnight, when Edna Whittington, the girl, and himself sat down to supper. To his relief and surprise it was a remarkably pleasant supper. He poured champagne and the girl, unreproached, was allowed to drink it. He fetched, with his own hands, as she and her mother expressed their fancy, plates of cold chicken or salmon, frozen strawberries and ice-cream, mousse, and mayonnaise.

"Did I see someone with pineapple gâteau, Henry?" Edna Whittington said and he went dutifully to search for it, pursued by a voice of unbelievably husky-sweet encouragement: "And be a lamb and find cream, Henry, if you can. Dancing makes me hungry."

In the next hour the wine, the food, and the utter absence of malignity in all that Edna Whittington said or did had lured him into a state where he was no longer apprehensive or uncertain or even ready to go into brave and antagonistic battle.

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In consequence he was as unprepared as a rabbit sitting before a stoat when, at one o'clock, Edna Whittington looked at her watch, then at the girl, then at himself, and said, "Child, it's time for you to go home. Henry, are you ready to take her?"

The girl did not move. He felt the ease of the evening shatter harshly with an ugly crack. His nerves upheld his skin with minute pinpricks of actual pain.

"I said it was time to go home, child. Get your things. Put your coat on. Mr. Bamfield will take you."

The girl still did not move or speak. Looking at her, he was reminded of the first morning he had ever met her. The innocent insolence had come back to her face again and he understood it now.

"Valerie."

Edna Whittington waited. He lifted his glass, drank some champagne, and waited too. The girl still did not move. She sat with black gloves composed and crossed on the table in front of her. Her eyes, not so wide and circular as they often were, looked half down at her hands, half at the dance floor. Just above the opening of the yellow dress her breasts started to rise and fall rather quickly but otherwise she did not stir.

"I am not in the habit of telling you twice," Edna Whittington said. The voice was icy. "Get your things at once and go home."

The band had begun playing. He clenched the stem of his glass, then relaxed his fingers, and looked straight at the ice-grey microscopic eyes of Edna Whittington.

"She's not going home," he said.

"Will you please mind your own business?"

He found himself drawing on remarkable reserves of calm, backed by the echo of a voice which kept saying, "I feel in a wonderful way that we've been growing up together."

"Child—!"

"I have told you, Edna, that she is not going home."

"Will you kindly mind your own business!"

He lifted his face, pushed his glass aside, and looked straight into the eyes of the girl. "Shall we dance?" he said.

She hesitated for a fraction of a second. He thought he saw at the same time an indecipherable shadow run across her face, as if she were actually in a turmoil of indecision. And he was in horror, for a moment, that she would fail, break down, and go home.

Then she smiled and got up. Inconsequently, as the skirt of the yellow dress moved into full view from below the table, he remembered the shining lamp of the solitary remaining quince burning in the blue November glassiness above the lake on cooling crystal afternoons, the last phial of the summer's honey, and he knew that now, at last, he had no need to doubt her.

A moment later they were dancing. They danced perhaps twice round the room before she even looked or spoke to him. Then slowly she lifted her face, staring at him as if she could not see him distinctly.

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" You're the bestest good one," she said. " The most bestest good one in the world."

And as she spoke he found, suddenly, that he could not bear to look at her. Her huge brown eyes were drowned in tears of happiness.

It was nearly three o'clock when Edna Whittington said to him in a husky discordant voice that betrayed, at last, the first snap of anger, " If you feel you've enjoyed yourself enough I should like to go home."

" I'm ready whenever you are," he said. " Shall I take you alone or shall we all go together? "

She paused before answering; and he thought for a moment that she was going to laugh, as she sometimes did, distastefully. Instead she picked the minutest shred of tobacco from her mouth, looked at it, and then flicked it away.

" We'll go together," she said. " I want to talk to you."

" As far as I'm concerned there's nothing to talk about."

" She's my daughter," she said, " and I want to talk to you."

" Very well, Edna," he said. " Talk to me."

" I'll talk to you," she said, " at home."

They drove home in frosty darkness, under a starry sky from which the moon had gone down. The girl sat in the back of the car, as before, and no one spoke a word.

When he pulled up before the cottage no one, for nearly half a minute, moved either.

" Will you come in? " Edna Whittington said at last.

" No, thank you."

" Then I'll talk to you here." She turned to the girl. " Go inside, Valerie. Here's the key."

The girl did not move or answer. Harry Bamfield turned, saw her sitting there motionless, mackintoshless, cool in the yellow dress, and said, " Better go." He took the key of the cottage from Edna Whittington and handed it to the girl. " I think it's better."

" I'm going," she said very quietly. " Goodnight. See you tomorrow."

Then, and he could only guess what it cost her to do it, the girl leaned over, turned his head with her hand, and kissed him on the lips, saying, " Thank you for everything. Good night."

Before he could move to open the door for her she was out of the car, running. He heard the key scrape in the lock. Then the door opened and shut and he was alone, in silence, with Edna Whittington.

He said at once, " I don't know what you have to say, Edna, but it's very late and I'd like to go home."

" How long has this been going on? " she said.

" About twenty years."

" If you're going to be flippant I shall probably lose my temper and—"

" I'm not going into explanations," he said, " if that's what you

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want, Edna, and the sooner you get it into your head the better."

She gave the distasteful beginning of a laugh. "All right. I'll just ask you one question. If that isn't too much?"

"Ask."

"I suppose you're going to tell me you love this child?"

"Very much."

"Setting aside the word infatuation," she said, "do you suppose she loves you?"

"I do, and she does," he said.

This time she did laugh. It was husky, unpleasant, and briefly sinister. "I honestly think you're serious about this."

"I'm not only serious," he said. "It's my whole life. And hers."

She started to light a cigarette. He disliked very much the idea of smoking in cars and he was annoyed as he saw the thin masked face, so drawn that it was almost skeletonized, in the light of the match and then in the burning glow of the cigarette held between the drooping magenta lips. "You know, Henry," she said. She blew smoke with what appeared to be unconstricted ease. "Somebody will have to be told."

He instantly thought of Katey: Katey the shabby lioness, passing through her blonde phases, her gin-mists; Katey yelling at him, calling him a squeak-mouse; messy, lost, groping, scrofulous Katey.

"Oh! Katey will be told," he said. "I'll tell Katey. Tomorrow."

Edna Whittington blew smoke in a thin excruciated line. "I wasn't thinking of Katey."

He couldn't think who else could possibly be told and for a moment he didn't care. "I daresay my friends have put two and two together," he said, "if that's what you mean."

"I wasn't thinking of your friends."

"Who then?" he said.

She drew smoke and released it. The smoke had a strange repugnant scent about it. He saw her eyes narrowed in the narrow face, the mouth drawn down, almost cadaverous, and he grasped that this was a smile.

"Valerie," she said. "Valerie will have to be told."

"Told?" he said. The car was half full of smoke, tainted with the scent of it. He felt his annoyance with her rising to temper. "Told what, for God's sake?"

"About us," she said.

"Us? And what about us?" He suddenly felt uneasy and on edge, nerves probing, the smoke sickening him.

"I think she has to be told," she said, "that you and I were lovers. Wouldn't you think that was only fair?"

He could not speak. He simply made one of his habitual groping gestures with his hands, up towards his face, as if his spectacles had suddenly become completely opaque with the white sickening smoke of her cigarette and he could not see.

"Not once," she said, "but many times. Oh yes, I think she

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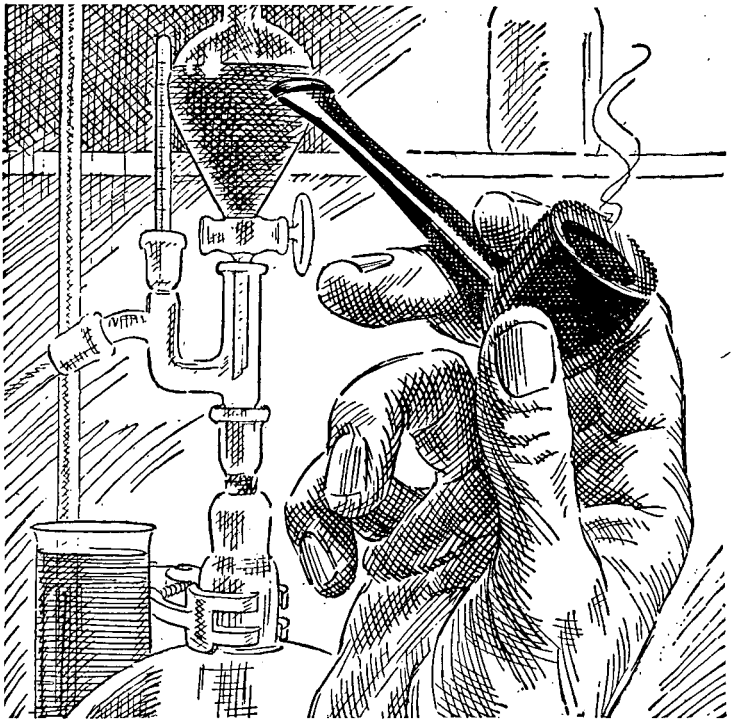

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has to be told—" She did not know quite what happened after that. He seemed suddenly to go crazy and started yelling. She had never known a Harry Bamfield who could yell, show anger, make foul noises, or use violence, and now he struck her in the face. The blow partially blinded her, knocking the cigarette from her lips, and in the confusion she heard him yelling blackly as he turned the key of the car.

When she recovered herself the car was travelling down the road, very fast. As it turned under dark trees, by a bend, she realized that the headlights were not on. He was bent forward over the wheel, glaring wildly through the thickish spectacles into a half darkness from which trees rushed up like gaunt shadows.

" I'll kill you, I'll kill you," he kept saying. " I'll kill you first."

She started screaming. Out of the darkness sprang a remembered figure of a Harry Bamfield in a white straw hat, white flannel trousers, and a college blazer, a rather soft Harry Bamfield, simple, easy-going, good-time-loving, defenceless, and laughing; one of the vacuous poor fish of her youth, in the days when she had kept a tabulation of conquests in a little book, heading it *In Memoriam: to those who fell*, her prettiness enamelled and calculated and as smart as the strip-poker or the midnight swimming-parties she went to, with other, even younger lovers, at long weekends.

Almost the last thing she remembered was struggling with the door of the car. When at first she could not open it she struck out at Harry Bamfield with her hands. At the second blow she hit him full in the spectacles. She heard them crunch as they broke against the bone of his forehead and then the car door was opening, swinging wide, and she was out of it, half jumping, half falling onto the soft frosted grass of the verge.

The car, driven by a blinded Harry Bamfield, swerved on wildly down the hill. She was conscious enough to hear a double scream of brakes as it skimmed the bends and then the crash of glass as it struck, far down, a final telegraph pole.

On the afternoon of Harry Bamfield's funeral the wind rose greyly, mild in sudden rainless squalls, across a landscape bare of leaves. The heads of many of the mourners were very bald and as they followed the coffin, in a long slow line, they gave the appearance of so many shaven monks solemnly crossing the churchyard.

At the house, afterwards, there were tea and coffee, with whisky and gin for those who wanted it. The Hunt was well represented. The city gentlemen, J. B. (Punch) Warburton, Freddie Jekyll, and George Reed Thompson, were there. The Sheriff of the County was represented. The Masters of several other Hunts, two from a neighbouring county, together with three local magistrates and two doctors from the local hospital, were there. Colonel and Mrs. Charnly-Rose, Justice Smythe and his two daughters, both excellent horsewomen, and several clergymen, farmers, horse-dealers, and corn-merchants were there. It was impossible to say how many people, from all sections of society, from villagers to men of title,

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had come to pay tribute to Harry Bamfield, who as everyone knew was a good huntsman, a good sport, a great horse-lover and a man in whom there was no harm at all.

In addition to the tea, coffee, whisky, and gin there were also cucumber sandwiches and many people said how excellent they were. Several people, as they ate them, walked out of the crowded house into the garden, for a little fresh air. Others strolled as far as the edges of the meadows, where Harry Bamfield's horses were grazing and his run of brushwood jumps stood dark and deserted beneath a squally sky.

As they walked they wondered, as people do at funerals, about the future: what would happen, who would get what, and above all what Katey would do. Across the fields and the hillside the wind blew into separated threads the wintry blades of grass, over the parched foxlike ruffles of dead bracken and, rising, rattled the grey bones of leafless boughs. "We'll miss him on the five-ten," the city gentlemen said and confessed that they could not possibly know what would happen, who would get what, or above all what Katey would do.

Nor could anyone possibly hear, in the rising winter wind, in the falling winter darkness, any sound of voices weeping across the hillside through the night-time.

★ **A new thriller by the brilliant young writer, Holly Roth, complete in next month's Argosy on sale April 10.**

SOLUTION to WHOA, NOAH! on page 89

1. *a. Dr. Johnson* *b. Fingal*
   c. President Roosevelt *d. Elizabeth Barrett Browning*
   e. Odysseus (or Ulysses) *f. Thomas Hardy*
2. *a. dog b. horse c. Scottie d. cattle e. cat*
3. *a. has no bark and b. has no tail*
4. *Anna Sewell; Munro Leaf; Thomas Gray*
5. *a. Lord Chesterfield b. Horace Walpole*
6. *a. in Greece, the Sphinx is a winged lion with a woman's head: in Egypt it changes sex and loses its wings; b. the Minotaur has a bull's head and a man's body*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Rolling-stock.* 9, *Marmalade.* 10, *Evils.* 11, *Urchin.* 12, *Rock-cake.* 13, *Sampan.* 15, *Mandates.* 18, *Cockerel.* 19, *Carrot.* 21, *Aircraft.* 23, *Settle.* 26, *Kings.* 27, *Exactness.* 28, *Cross-section.*

Down. 1, *Rumours.* 2, *Lyric.* 3, *Inanimate.* 4, *Grab.* 5, *Teetotal.* 6, *Check.* 7, *Caskets.* 8, *Pilaster.* 14, *Macaroni.* 16, *Dialectic.* 17, *Selfless.* 18, *Cracker.* 20, *Treason.* 22, *Riser.* 24, *Trevi.* 25, *Bass.*

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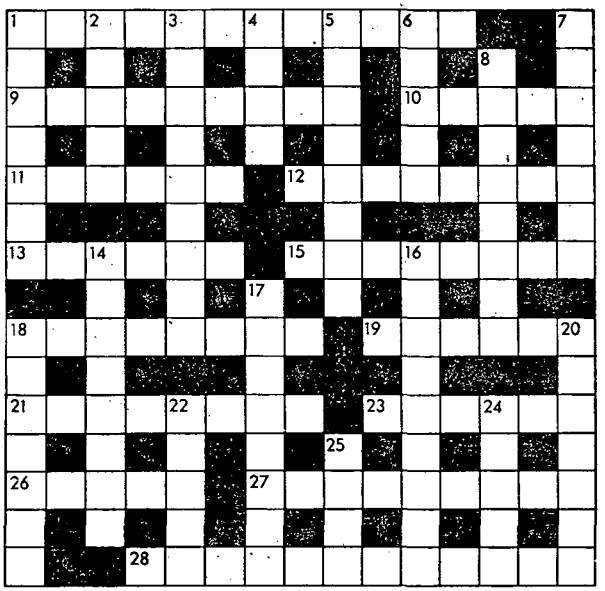
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 143

★



CLUES

Across

1 Inebriated cattle on the line ? (7-5).

9 Poetically scorned by royalty as butter substitute (9).

10 Headless fiends remain noxious (5).

11 Not a boy at sea (6).

12 Delicacy made from stone-ground flour ? (4-4).

13 A dish that to the little prophet is almost junk (6).

15 Dan's mate gives orders out of place (8).

18 Mix eel crock for something better in a casserole (8).

19 Vegetable sounds like motor ataxy (6).

21 You have to have it to fly it (6).

23 Seat of a stayer ? (6).

26 Samuel's followers (5).

27 Axe scents ? It makes for accuracy (9).

28 A few bad-tempered soldiers seen sideways (5-7).

Down

1 We claim a drink and give rise to talk (7).

2 " O —— Love, half angel and half bird " (Browning) (5).

3 I'm neat and in a muddle ; but lifeless (9).

4 Clutch a card game (4).

5 Abstinent score at golf ? (8).

6 Pattern of a hindrance (5).

7 Bassanio took a one-in-three chance on these (7).

8 I'm in plaster—for support (8).

14 The pasta's dandy (8).

16 It's logical to rearrange lactic die (9).

17 Good—or lacking in personality ? (8).

18 The biscuit bangs at Christmas (7).

20 " Whilst bloody —— flourished over us " (Shakespeare) (7).

22 Step in a Paris ermine coat (5).

24 Break a rivet into a coin-filled fountain (5).

25 This singer's useful in the garden (4).

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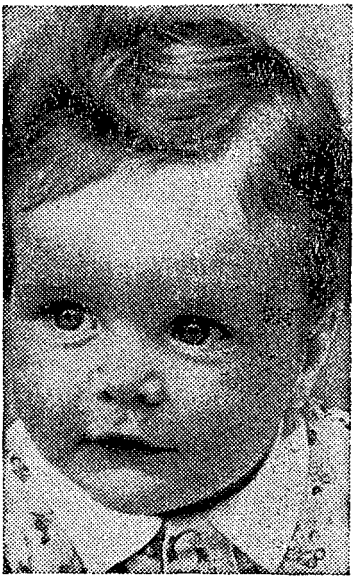

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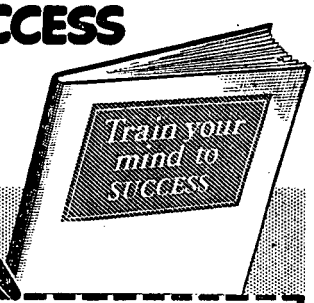

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